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A Temporal Perspective on Flexible Careers: Reconciling Multiple Perspectives, Levels of Analysis, and Time Scales

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A Temporal Perspective on Flexible Careers:
Reconciling Multiple Perspectives, Levels of Analysis, and Time Scales

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Dedication

To God, without whom none of this would be possible.

To Dawna, who encouraged me to take on this endeavor, and was there for me 10 years later when I finally had the confidence to begin.

To my husband, Reginald, for never asking “Why?” or “How much?”

A Temporal Perspective on Flexible Careers: Reconciling Multiple Perspectives, Levels of Analysis, and Time Scales

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Organizational scholars have given considerable attention to changing patterns of work and careers. A globalized economy and technological advances have created fast-paced work environments that are no longer supported by traditional organizational structures. The nature of the employee-employer relationship has also changed in many organizations with employees relying less on employers for stability and permanence, and employers shifting the responsibility for career planning and professional development to the employee. Individuals are also free to behave as active agents in creating innovative work-based practices that allow them to fulfill personal demands and commitments. These issues have opened the door for flexible work designs and arrangements. This dissertation explores the need and desire for flexibility among the qualified workforce, the negotiation strategies organizational members use to enact flexibility, and their attempts to extend work based flexibility across the lifespan. A five-month qualitative study is presented that considers the temporal nature of these changes, the varying time scales implicated in a range of flexible work practices and norms, and the various levels at which temporal flexibility is shaped. Findings support a perception

of organizational flexibility as a temporal resource, and changing perceptions for employees working both within and outside of formal organizational policies. Results also demonstrate shifts in career behaviors as individuals actively engage in enacting flexibility across the lifespan. The temporal approach taken in this study contributes to our understanding of organizational flexibility by clarifying and disentangling theoretical concepts to more accurately explain the experiences of individuals in the contemporary organizational environment.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Review of Literature

The contemporary organizational environment has changed in dramatic ways. A broad range of scholars have taken note of organizational changes and dedicated time and attention to understanding how individuals experience and negotiate work-life issues. Further, technological advances have created industries that are now fast-paced with frequent needs to quickly adapt to a changing marketplace (Rassuli, 2005). Combined with more dual-earner couples, longer average workweeks, and changes in both the timing and location of work (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001), scholars have taken note of how these experiences reflect and reinforce shifting occupational norms and values.

A traditional career was once believed to span a small number of physical locations and move along a defined, linear path. Employees were hired based on their ability to contribute their knowledge and skills, were socialized into the norms and values of the organization, and were trained for continued growth until they were prepared to progress upward to the next level in the organizational hierarchy. Employees were motivated and managed by the promise of long-term rewards and the prospect of promotion and higher status. This linear career model has long been the standard for what constitutes *good work* (Lair & Wieland, 2012). The traditional career model, however, is no longer supported by most organizational structures (Sullivan, 1999). Furthermore, organizations confronted with economic challenges no longer prioritize employee feedback, social support, and resources, leading many employees to become proactive in

optimizing their own work environments (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012). An economic climate that is less secure and predictable (Osnowitz, 2010) has led to an increase in flexible work practices (FWPs) and arrangements (FWAs), and a rise in flexible jobs and careers among the highly qualified workforce (Ruiner, Wilkens, & Küpper, 2013). Alternative career models (e.g., contract, freelance, and contingent arrangements) are believed to account for as much as 20 percent of the individuals employed in the United States and higher percentages in other countries (Cappelli & Keller, 2013a). Furthermore, Flexjobs, an online employment service dedicated to assisting employers hire for and employees secure flexible positions, estimated a 36 percent increase from 2014 to 2015 in telecommuting jobs (Reynolds, 2016).

As organizations continue to alter hierarchical structures by adopting flexible work arrangements to attract and retain the most talented members, both those individuals operating within flexible workplace policies as well as those creating flexible opportunities for themselves will become more and more relevant to organizational research. As such, scholars are making attempts to describe the nature and qualities that are characteristic of flexible work while also highlighting the differences between contemporary work and the traditional career model. To this end, scholars have explored a variety of job fields and classifications. Although great strides have been made, the need still exists to establish a manageable framework from which to examine these arrangements. The inability to accurately distinguish alternative employment arrangements from flexible work is creating an incomplete picture and hindering the ability to build knowledge about contemporary work (Cappelli & Keller, 2013a). As the

surge in flexible work continues, organizational scholars will be challenged to empirically explore the characteristics of employees and the organizations employing them using a methodology and a framework that is fitting for this heterogeneous group.

The temporal nature of these changes (e.g., the varying time scales implicated in the range of flexible work practices and norms, and the various organizational systems or levels at which temporal flexibility is shaped) all point to the need for a temporal perspective in developing the construct of *flexibility* in organizations and careers. For instance, specifying time scale helps to clarify each construct (Ballard & McVey, 2014; Zaheer, Albert, & Zaheer, 1999) and points to a critical distinction unaddressed in extant research: The difference between flexible work practices and flexible careers. Although elements of flexibility are part of an increasing number of occasional work arrangements (for instance, telecommuting or adjusting one's schedule during the workday for personal errands)—resulting in a rise in flexible work practices—it is an oversimplification to assume that these same work arrangements necessarily reflect long-term flexible careers. Finally, rather than focus on the level of the individual or the level of the organization, a meso approach simultaneously considers the interplay of both through organizational members' actual practices (Ballard & Seibold, 2003).

The absence of a unifying theoretical framework for flexibility research is indicative of the challenge scholars face when attempting to explicate a construct that is not completely understood or directly observable: *organizational temporality*. For this reason, the introduction of a temporal perspective is brought forth to address these multiple challenges. First, flexibility—both of work practices, work arrangements, and

careers—is located as a temporal construct in order to distinguish it from varied and interrelated concepts. To this end, key aspects of a meso level model of organizational temporality—including the distinction and relationships among objective, subjective, and intersubjective times—are proposed for their ability to offer some initial clarity for scholarly investigations. Finally, the issue of time scale is raised to explicate differences between flexible work practices and flexible careers.

MULTIPLE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS IN DEFINING FLEXIBLE WORK

DEFINING FLEXIBLE WORK: AUTONOMY, FREEDOM, AGENCY, AND ORGANIZATIONAL TEMPORALITY

In today's global, technology-driven economy many employees enjoy flexible work schedules and related accommodations, allowing them to meet their own needs and expectations while also maintaining a traditional employer-employee relationship. This shift in policies has led to a growth in work arrangements beyond the standard 9-5 (Wilkin, 2013) and in the common assumption that—in a contemporary workplace—every career can now be considered flexible. As organizations continue to trend towards flexible and "employee-friendly" work arrangements, the concept of *flexibility* begins to lose efficacy as a way to differentiate across types of work (Wilkin, 2013). Categorizing certain kinds of work as flexible may be useful with regard to specific populations of workers (e.g., teleworkers, seasonal workers, and self-employed). However, describing any work experience that seems to deviate from the expected spatio-temporal pattern (e.g., prevalence of adaptability and/or organizational mobility) as belonging to a poorly defined category called "flexible" is problematic because it ignores the considerable

variations existing in and between these work arrangements (Cappelli & Keller, 2013b). Additionally, it ignores the fact that flexibility is an enduring trait that has always varied across working conditions (Ballard & Seibold, 2000, 2003). It, therefore, becomes necessary to carefully examine the implicit definition of *flexibility* or flexible work found in extant literature and to be more precise in our research and scholarship on the topic.

The concept of flexibility is prevalent in organizational literature, but can be shrouded within a myriad of other related terminology that is often used interchangeably (e.g., agency, adaptability, or autonomy) and at times even conflicts with one another. Further, as Myers and colleagues (2012) explain, most studies generally situate flexibility at either the individual or the organizational level. At the individual level, for example, Campbell and van Wanrooy (2013) examine working-time preferences among organizational members; while at the organizational level, Putnam, Myers, and Gailliard (2014) explore the management and supervision of flexible workplace initiatives. Such discussions have proven useful, but the focus on either level of analysis leaves multiple literatures and multiple definitions on a critical concept for contemporary work. It also makes it difficult to form generalizations across studies (Myers et al., 2012; Ryan, Jacques, & Colombi, 2011). Therefore, below, a meso level definition of flexibility rooted in actual practices is offered that reflects both individual characteristics (such as motivation to use flexible work arrangements) as well as the actual organizational communication structures (reflected in formal policies permitting the use of flexible work arrangements). This is followed by an examination of the common discourse of organizational flexibility and the practices and policies commonly equated with this term.

A MESO APPROACH: FLEXIBILITY AS TEMPORALITY

Ballard and Seibold (2003) argue that temporality is at the center of members' performance of work and conceptualize flexibility as an *enactment of time.* Enactments refer to the way individuals "perform" time (p. 385) and denote temporal practices at the individual, group, and organizational levels. As Ballard and Seibold (2004) explain, temporal flexibility is performed as a function of the task or a consequence of organizational norms and practices. Relating to task, for example, employees are now commonly expected to spend a considerable portion of their day at work or engaged in work-related activities (Trougakos, Hideg, Cheng, & Beal, 2014). With fewer hierarchical levels due to downsizing and reorganization, flexibility becomes inherent in the task as workers plan, organize, and monitor their work jointly in order to achieve organizational goals (Van Dyne, Kossek, & Lobel, 2007). Relatedly, Southerton (2003) claims individuals may perceive the need to work harder because of greater workplace competition so flexible organizational designs offer a way for individuals to increase their work hours while simultaneously decreasing expectations of face time. Temporal flexibility may also be a function of group norms and practices (Ballard & Seibold, 2004). For example, flexible work patterns have become common for professionals working interdependently in distributed teams (Van Dyne et al., 2007) and among the workforce in knowledge-intensive firms (Ruiner et al., 2013).

Temporality in flexibility studies, however, is frequently overlooked from a theoretical perspective (Ballard & Seibold, 2003). For example, Martin and colleagues (2011) examine workers' ability to address unexpected time constraints by adjusting an

existing work schedule as a measure of attitudes regarding non-standard schedules (i.e., nights and weekends). Although time was a factor in their study, they used objective measures such as average weekly hours worked and number of weekend days worked in an average month to control for attitudes towards days worked. Drawing from Ballard and Seibold's (2003) meso level model of organizational temporality, Martin and colleagues (2011) work relies solely on clock or calendar time, referred to as *objective time*, to the exclusion of *subjective time* (arising at the individual level via members' personal and idiosyncratic experiences) and *intersubjective time* (arising through local, shared conceptions). While objective measures of clock time are critically important in studies of work flexibility, objective time is also always informed by subjective and intersubjective times as well.

Martin et al.'s (2011) work reflects the tendency for organizational scholars to ignore the importance of subjective and intersubjective temporality in studies of flexibility and is also representative of an even larger empirical issue. Specifically, time is a central factor in shaping the experience of work; and communication about this experience functions at multiple levels—including the organizational environment (such as policy makers), employers, teams, and individuals (Ballard & Seibold, 2003; Myers et al., 2012). Additionally, a temporal perspective drawn from Ballard and Seibold's (2003) theoretical framework underscores the need to focus on actual practices found at the meso level rather than solely on an individual or organizational level of analysis. Below an examination of related literature at each of these levels demonstrates how a temporal perspective exists at the nexus of each.

AN INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL APPROACH: FLEXIBILITY AS FREEDOM AND AUTONOMY

Examining flexibility at the individual level most frequently involves an analysis of how employees might use, interpret, and respond to organizational policies (Myers et al., 2012). Employees are placing a greater emphasis on work-life balance and are actively pursuing ways to engage their personal interests (The Futures Company, 2013). Organizational policies and programs allowing individuals the opportunity to use their time, even if during the workday, for what they find most important becomes necessary to attract and retain talent. The work of Trougakos and colleagues (2014) and the role of autonomy in the workplace provides a relevant example. Their research suggests the importance of individuals having the freedom to use their personal time during the workday (i.e., lunch hour or break periods) as they see fit. More specifically, their work reveals that the extent to which individuals can determine how they utilize breaks in the workday may be just as important as the activity that is done during that time. Even if additional tasks such as housework or childcare are handled during these breaks, autonomy over the decision may offset any negative effects of the time pressures created by these obligations. Key from their research and most relevant for organizations and policy-making institutions is that the benefits of autonomy are not realized through a particular kind of work design but accrue from choice throughout the experience of work, including taking breaks from work. This is consistent with work by Ballard and Seibold (2004) which finds flexibility predicts job satisfaction even after controlling for income. Thus, the larger *practice* of flexibility appears to play a greater role in workplace wellness than does the formal design.

A significant feature distinguishing research cast at the individual-level is a view of organizational and occupational flexibility as a temporal *affordance* whereby employees are given the ability to define their use of time and to make clear how time spent engaging in work related activities can or should be used. In this way, flexibility becomes a benefit and/or privilege used to align work with one's personal values and preferences and individualistic definitions of success (Bailyn, 2006). *Chronemics*, the study of the role of time in communication, concerns the examination and use of various kinds of objective and personal temporalities involved in the daily timing and the habits associated with formal and informal obligations (Bruneau, 2009), and has been a central focus in organizational research (Sabelis, 2009). Likewise, control over time has long been an essential aspect of the employer-employee relationship (Garsten, 2008). Previous organizational studies examining flexible work practices with time as a unit of analysis, however, have not moved beyond objective measures linked to clocks, calendars, and other time-keeping devices (Bruneau, 2009; Hernandi, 1992). Common references to time in organizational research include objective measures such as time spent at work (Breedveld, 1998; Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012), activities done during specific times of day (Trougakos, et al., 2014), and work time/day preferences (Campbell & van Wanrooy, 2013; Martin, et al., 2011). These measures limit our understanding of time and temporality in the work environment.

A focus on the affordances of flexibility responds to Sabelis' (2009) call for a multi-perspective view of time in organizations to include subjective, intersubjective, and objective temporality. This view allows for the consideration of some important empirical

issues. For example, the allure of free time and for fluid, controllable chunks of time is believed to attract and retain employees (Garsten, 2008), but questions remain about the perceptions of individuals in organizations who make use of employer provided flexible work arrangements (e.g., job sharing, telecommuting, flex-time, etc.) compared to those in organizations that do not even when organizational policies are made available. Examining flexibility as a temporal affordance also allows for the consideration of individual initiative in mapping flexible work and career patterns across the lifespan in the absence of clearly defined organizational policies. This assumption leads to the following research question:

RQ1: How do individuals describe the need or desire for flexibility?

AN ORGANIZATIONAL-LEVEL APPROACH: ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION AND MOVEMENT

Organizations, recognizing new forms of work (e.g., job sharing, distributed teams, etc.), began providing flexible work options for employees ranging from when and where work is performed to how information might be shared (Benko, Anderson, & Vickberg, 2011). Flexible work arrangements and schedules are introduced to give employees ownership in their work lives and the ability to adapt their engagement levels with the employer as their individual priorities change over time (Benko & Weisberg, 2007). For example, policies were introduced to address child care and other family obligations. New generations of employees entered the workplace with different expectations about their participation in the organization, while more mature workers desired flexible options to remain in the labor market despite changing life goals and

demands. Successful organizations found it necessary to rethink employee growth and development and broaden career pathways beyond the traditional trajectory *up* the career ladder. One such example of this new way of thinking about employee development is the *corporate lattice system* that allows for lateral or diagonal movement as well as planned career descents (Benko, et al., 2011). The lattice involves collaboration between employers and employees to design customized career paths that take into consideration the changing needs of both the organization and the employee (Benko & Weisberg, 2007).

The lattice career model, although not widely discussed in academic literature, is certainly flexible in the way it offers employees life-long career options for keeping work and personal lives balanced; however, employees must continue to rely on the organization to create a viable career track based on the employee's interests, goals, and needs. Further, the lattice model may represent a collaborative workplace that is responsive to employee needs, but falls short in moving beyond organizational investments that may still fail to retain valued employees (Benko, et al., 2011). Critics argue that even in situations where organizations are proactive in addressing employee needs, individuals who pursue flexible work arrangements often feel stigmatized for moving along a path that is still the exception to the corporate ladder norm (Ballard & Gossett, 2007; Benko, et al., 2011).

Putman and colleagues (2014) examine workplace flexibility and the organization's efforts in adjusting the when, where, and how of work. Specifically, the analysis of workplace policies, flexible work arrangements, and/or specific benefits

provided by the organization to help employees obtain flexibility reveal what these authors define as an *autonomy paradox.* The implementation of a flexible schedule is often accomplished, ironically, through rigid procedures that control the access to the freedom to establish one's own schedule. Thus, autonomy or flexibility is constrained by firm deadlines and fixed task expectations (Putnam et al., 2014). Autonomy is further controlled by supervisors who support flexible work arrangements publicly, while privately discouraging employees from using them (Putnam et al., 2014). This evidence has been used to further explain why when flexible arrangements exist, employees may still fail to use them or feel obligated to work additional hours to account for time spent away from work (Green & Leeves, 2013; Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012; Stephens, Cho, & Ballard, 2012). However, without reference to the temporal nature of flexibility, these assumptions position discussions of flexibility as a conflict between employers' concerns for productivity and employees' private needs (Bailyn, 2006), and therefore, may be limited. This further highlights the need for a temporal perspective cast at the meso level that takes into account both individual and organizational factors. In the next section, an extension of Ballard and Gossett's (2007) typology of nontraditional work relationships is offered to clarify important distinctions between flexible work practices and flexible careers – an issue that points to the importance of considering time scale. This discussion offers a valuable starting point in defining flexible careers, and leads to the second research question proposed for this dissertation:

RQ2: How do individuals negotiate work-based flexibility within organizations?

FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES AND FLEXIBLE CAREERS:

DISENTANGLING CONCEPTS THROUGH CONSIDERING TIME SCALE

Defining the term *career* presents its own challenges, making operationalizing the *flexible career* even more difficult. Although there is no agreed upon definition of career among organizational scholars, Sullivan and Baruch's (2009) explanation represents a good starting point for analyzing the discourse of flexible careers. These authors define career as "an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individual's lifespan" (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1543). This definition illustrates that in response to the question, "What do you do?" an individual is representing both an organizational identity as well as their perspective of how other occupational experiences (e.g., volunteering, entrepreneurial endeavors, and experiential learning) defines one's career trajectory—both potentially long-term, ongoing issues.

This perspective of careers has been the framework by which traditional career research has been conducted (Hall & Chandler, 2005). In response to this framework—commonly referred to as the *linear* model—one approach has been to categorize career types (e.g., boundaryless, protean, contingent, etc.) by distinguishing them from traditional career patterns supported by a hierarchical organizational structure. Whereas traditional arrangements emphasized stability, hierarchy, and clearly defined job positions for career progression (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994), researchers examine features such as job stability, flexibility, and work hours and location in order to distinguish alternative arrangements.

Categorical career labels are the result of environmental changes in organizations as well as individuals altering their career attitudes and behaviors in response (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). For example, economic changes and technological demands in certain industries have increased the cost and risk of retaining and retraining a full-time labor force (Rassuli, 2005). New work practices have also created jobs requiring a specific body of knowledge or set of skills that may then be eliminated, outsourced, or replaced with new requirements (Osnowitz, 2010). Further, individuals are now driven more by their own desires for intrinsically rewarding work than by organizational career management practices (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). This has created opportunities for both individuals and organizations to consider new work arrangements. These new forms of work often appear in the literature under the umbrella of *flexible* careers, thus giving an impression that flexible careers are not only common but also readily accessible for most individuals and further highlighting the need to specify important distinctions and differences.

Using Time Scale to Assist in Disentangling Concepts

In order to disentangle multiple and related issues, a key distinction to make at the outset is the difference between organizational members' individual goals (which reflect variations in their subjective temporal experience—such as the desire to downshift or upshift depending upon personal circumstances and goals) and their formal organizational relationships (which reflect variations in objective organizational temporal structures – such as contingent membership or contract work). Notably, both their goals and their relationships may unfold over different time scales, making the timeframes

considered in the use of these terms a critical issue. That is, an individual may regularly employ flexible work practices (e.g., telecommuting) and not be able to access a flexible career due to varied institutional constraints. Likewise, an individual may cultivate a flexible career without the affordances of contemporary flexible work practices. Ballard and Gossett's (2007) typology of nontraditional work relationships is used to help draw these distinctions.

Ballard and Gossett (2007) offer a typology designed to explicate the temporal aspects of flexible work. They argue that time is a defining quality of nonstandard work arrangements, and describe four membership types based on two of the four constitutive communication flows in McPhee and Zaug's framework (2000)—*membership negotiation* (messages about the meaning of membership) and *activity coordination* (messages about the time and timing of work)—each flow viewed through a temporal lens. Membership negotiation is viewed on a scale from permanent to temporary while activity coordination is viewed on a scale from fixed to flexible.

Together these two flows result in work that can be characterized variously as *standard membership*, *contingent membership*, *virtual* (which might now be considered *flexible) membership,* and *vendor-based non-membership*. In their framework, standard membership reflects fixed activity coordination and permanent membership. Standard membership also assumes a formal organizational relationship, often conceived in terms of a traditional career. Contingent membership reflects fixed activity coordination and temporary membership. This is also a formal organizational relationship, and may be seen as useful for building particular types of careers (Ballard & Gossett, 2007). In

contrast, virtual membership offers flexible activity coordination and permanent membership. Virtual membership reflects the use of flexible practices and work may occur during some parts of a week, or day, and not others. While it has implications for promotion and impression management, the practice itself may be limited to the short-term. Finally, vendor-based non-membership reflects flexible activity coordination and temporary membership and is yet another formal organizational relationship. Today—perhaps then as well—messages that support a concept of "permanent" membership are antiquated as are messages that reflect activity coordination as occurring in a "fixed" timeframe. Nonetheless, reference to this model is helpful in distinguishing individual-level characteristics, including personal goals, often referenced in discussions about flexible careers (such as virtual membership) from formal organizational relationships (such as contingent membership).

In addition to pointing toward time scale as a distinguishing characteristic of varied membership types, Ballard and Gossett (2007) also assign connotative labels to each type of membership to capture the unrealized promise of flexible work and flexible careers—where the use of contingent work shapes "guest" membership, the use flexible work practices are sometimes associated with "ghost" membership, and only traditional temporal relationships (those without temporal gaps and that use fixed working times) reflect "real" membership in terms of value within existing reward structures. The utility of time scale as a means to disentangle flexible work from flexible careers is explored further in the discussion of common career categories below and the implications of Ballard and Gossett's (2007) model are drawn as well.

Boundaryless career. Recognizing the instabilities of the linear career model, Arthur and Rousseau coined the term *boundaryless career* to explain sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994). Initial research based on Arthur and Rousseau's work focuses on physical movement, but Sullivan and Baruch (2009) offer several other points of departure from the traditional career model to the boundaryless career concept. Individuals who reject existing career opportunities for personal or family reasons as well as individuals who perceive movement as a necessary function of job growth and marketability may be classified as boundaryless. Likewise, academics (such as adjunct faculty) that work on a part-time or as needed basis are often considered boundaryless because of their frequent job moves and lack of stability (Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Upon closer examination, however, many of the job categories that are considered boundaryless based on Arthur and Rousseau's original work may in reality be more accurately characterized as standard or traditional. Recent research on academic careers is illustrative in highlighting its traditional nature (Williams & Lee, 2016). In the early stages of the academic career, faculty may be employed by multiple institutions or organizations and move between institutions in order to gain additional experience and remain gainfully employed. Movement in this way is often considered boundaryless on the surface, but may be perceived by the employee as linear. Thus, it is viewed as traditional membership by the employee due to the formal organizational relationship, despite the fact that the time scale for each may look more like a contingent membership. Mobility decisions in the academic career are based on a belief in a predetermined destination or career path.

Movement, in most cases, is in pursuit of the long-term goal of full-time, stable employment in a tenure-track position. From the perspective of the employee, such moves may not be in the service of a boundaryless career but may indicate institutional-level job instability.

The focus on physical movement is a limitation of the boundaryless career model because it fails to distinguish among different types or causes of mobility while also neglecting to consider lateral or downward career moves or career interruptions due to life or personal demands; both temporal issues (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Voluntary career changes, particularly when in the same line of work, are often a part of an individual's normal career development (Tan & Kramer, 2012); and what is frequently called a boundaryless career, in fact, may be an individual making use of both virtual and contingent membership models at different times. Many individuals, for instance, self-initiate a downward career move for personal or family reasons. This may involve more virtual membership or even non-membership. In the boundaryless model, however, these career decisions are considered to be a rejection of existing career opportunities (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) and assumes the rejection is equated with a psychological mindset (i.e., boundaryless future).

Others may leave to pursue opportunities they feel are not available given human resources policies within their current organization (e.g., lack of life-long learning or family leave initiatives). Furthermore, individuals generally enter and leave jobs more frequently now, with "guest" membership (part-time and contingent employment relationships) often lasting longer than "real," full-time, regular employment (Cappelli &

Keller, 2013a; Sullivan, 1999). This evidence further indicates the need to take a temporal approach to consider flexibility as well as the importance of considering changing employee motivations and needs.

Protean career. At its most basic level, flexibility is often described as the ability to change or to adapt to one's surroundings. The protean careerist is able to brand and repackage his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities as needed for a changing work environment and remain viable in a competitive job market (Hall, 2004). Beyond the ability to meet organizational needs, individuals with a protean orientation also value intrinsic rewards and continuous learning leaving them in charge of their own career management and development (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Although the protean career concept was originally introduced in 1976 (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), much like the boundaryless career model it was in response to a changing organizational landscape. Referring to massive restructuring of the workforce in the United States and other world economies, companies became known as "shamrock organizations" because of the existence of three primary clusters of work—full-time (standard), part-time, and temporary, or contingent (Hall, 2004, p. 5). These clusters presented new opportunities for employees and represented a new organizational structure.

The protean career concept has had considerable impact in the literature on career theory, but has been criticized for reinforcing common career metaphors. The work of Tan and Kramer (2012) highlights three main motivations for career change: responding to a calling (whether religious or nonreligious), dissatisfaction and inability to identify with a previous career leading to an exploration of other options, and identifying a

passion for a new career often through exposure during the previous career. The protean career may accurately describe individuals who find their true calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005) or *career fit* as Tan and Kramer (2012) identified as well as those who are otherwise successful in non-traditional work arrangements; but falls short in its ability to adequately describe the variations in flexible arrangements (e.g., virtual and non-membership) as well as the differences between individuals employed in such positions. For example, Hall (2004) identifies the importance of *metacompetencies* such as adaptability and self-awareness that equip individuals to be more protean as they enact their careers. While this addresses the interplay of individual difference, it also highlights the need for additional research on the potential for the protean concept to fully explain flexible work and careers and invites the application of a temporal perspective in examining individual difference variables across the lifespan.

While the boundaryless and protean concepts have dominated a great deal of the research on careers (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), there is recognition of the need for newer conceptualizations that might better explain the next generation of careers. Even with attempts to better capture the complete picture of contingent and virtual work, career scholars admit that many of the participants in their samples exhibit more of a standard membership and a traditional career path by following linear, ladder-like advancement patterns and maintaining a strong commitment to the organization (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Categorization is one attempt at explaining alternative career arrangements. This review is in no way an indication that these categories cannot accurately explain some flexible work patterns, but it illustrates an opportunity to more fully elucidate the

complexities of these arrangements. Categories imply a similarity among elements within the same group and, in the case of flexible careers, each arrangement is unique. Also, because the number of different arrangements is expanding, nonstandard jobs often have little in common with each other (Cappelli & Keller, 2013a); meaning there may be more differences within groups than between them. Therefore, a temporal lens may offer a synthetic and enduring approach to understand flexible work and flexible careers.

Contingent and contract careers. Short-term labor, otherwise known as contingent or contract labor, has become a typical feature of working life in today's organizations. A concept that was first introduced in 1985 (Rassuli, 2005), the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that in 2005 approximately 5.7 million contingent workers were employed in the United States; or about 4 percent of the total employment population (Redpath, Hurst, & Devine, 2007). A 2010 United States Government Accountability Office report estimates 40 percent of the U.S. workforce is made up of contingent workers (Pofeldt, 2015). Contingent workers were originally defined as employees who expect to be terminated in one year or less and worked for their current employer for one year or less (Rassuli, 2005); however, the term is now commonly used in reference to a wide range of virtual and non-membership employment positions ranging from technical knowledge work and health care to academics in educational institutions.

Contemporary organizations are restructuring work groups and positions to accommodate the speed at which the economy is adapting (Gill, 2013; Rassuli, 2005). Rassuli (2005) argues the increasing cost of retraining a full-time labor force on a

continuous basis combined with the short-lived, cyclical nature of business has caused many organizations to turn to short-term labor. Likewise, employees may have fewer expectations of their employers and instead rely on themselves for their own career planning and development (Redpath et al., 2007). Employees looking for opportunities to explore work in different environments and industries and on projects they find personally fulfilling and enjoyable (Redpath et al., 2007) may find contingent and contract arrangements attractive and be drawn to short-term positions because of the perceived flexibility they offer (Rassuli, 2005).

The distinctions between contingent or contract workers and standard, permanent or virtual workers in many organizations, however, may not be as pronounced as the literature suggests, limiting the descriptive utility of the job classification given the realities of the contemporary working world. The challenges in classifying temporary positions as truly flexible, as Ballard and Gossett (2007) identified, may also create problems when attempting to define an appropriate study sample when contingent and contract workers cannot be clearly distinguished from standard employees. Despite these challenges, researchers continue to use career labels and categories to explore the nature of changing work arrangements and use these classifications in making comparisons of occupational outcomes between groups. It follows, therefore, that when viewed as a matter of organizational temporality, the issue of personal goals within a given organizational structure compared to formal relationships where individuals carry any number of orientations toward work can be disentangled. Ultimately, flexible work

practices may reflect individual-level strategies to create a sustainable career model, but are not equivalent to a flexible career.

The Precariat. Finally, flexibility in work or career is often associated with *insecurity.* For example, in contrast to the typology offered by Ballard and Gossett (2007), Garsten (2008) defines flexibility as "work arrangements other than full-time, permanent contracts" (p. 5), a perspective that is akin to contingent and vendor based non-membership. Based on this definition, flexible work often involves movement based on employers' demands with uncertain pay and a tentative future. Further, Garsten characterizes flexible work as involving a continuous readiness for change and movement between physical work locations. Garsten (2008), however, also recognizes a different version of flexible work in which individuals are able to move beyond the monotony of everyday tasks. In this sense, flexible work provides freedom for individuals to develop their own niche and, most importantly, to make use of their personal time based on individual preference. Though very different versions, the common thread existing between both is, whether voluntary or not, flexible work is inherently temporary, unstable work.

Referencing the multitude of economic challenges occurring in both developing and industrialized countries, Standing (2011) identified an emerging class of workers suffering from increasingly insecure employment. This new class, the *precariat*, includes individuals in casual, contract, and/or seasonal positions. Marked primarily by decreasing job tenure (Frase, 2013), characteristics of precariat work include fixed and often short-term contracts where candidates are hired to deliver specific tasks (Osnowitz, 2010), a

general lack of supervision and training, and isolation in relation to the larger organization (Gregg, 2011); but also the absence of clear job descriptions and career paths, and the safety and regularity of working conditions (Frase, 2013). Beyond the insecurity of physical conditions, a number of psychological effects have been documented as well. Gregg (2011) sites an "accumulation of indignities" (p. 57) including heightened antagonism toward an employer and feelings of anxiety among workers. These features are often contrasted with the benefits of permanent organizational roles (i.e., paid sick and vacation leave, professional development, and ongoing relationships with fellow workers).

Although precarious work arrangements all differ in one way or another from the standard, permanent, full-time job (Osnowitz, 2010) or the standard employment relationship (SER) characterized by full-time continuous employment with one employer, as a concept *precarious work* lacks a clear definition (Siegmann & Schiphorst, 2016). For instance, Frase (2013) maintains that any individual who seems relatively disadvantaged in the labor market is "swept into the ranks of the precariat" (p. 12). Further, the assumption is made that individuals in precarious positions are investing their time and talents in hopes it will lead to more predictable and secure employment in the future (Gregg, 2011). This ignores other possible arrangements in which individuals may actual seek out these work designs and opportunities and, more relevant to this study's purpose, denies the realities of a changing work environment in which long-term, permanent attachment, or "labor security" (Frase, 2013, p. 11) between employer and employee has clearly diminished. Recognizing the hypocrisy in organizations that demand loyalty

without reciprocating security and recognition of service, Gregg (2011) also questions whether it is possible the precarious experiences of temporary work may act as preparation for the flexible, web-based work environment that has become typical of today's organizational environment, particularly for young employees.

Across the Lifespan

Changes in work patterns and practices across the lifespan reflects yet another fundamentally temporally aspect of this discussion. Ballard and Gossett (2007) describe individual-level temporal influences that might shape the experience of flexible work across the lifespan. They explain how early- and late-career professionals often attribute more personal agency to the use of flexible work practices—for younger workers it affords the possibility of experimentation, and for late career professionals it helps them to extend their income-earning potential while downshifting to a more sustainable pace. However, midcareer professionals often have more mixed views of flexible work for a number of reasons.

Schedule flexibility is heralded as the solution for workers in terms of meeting various life demands and stimulating work-life enrichment (Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012). For employees, the effective scheduling and use of time across tasks both at work and outside work can affect performance and satisfaction, on the job and off (Schriber & Gutek, 1987). In this way flexibility is perceived as a resource of human agency (Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012), where flexibility exercised in one role can improve the quality of life in another role. Agency is defined (in this context) as the "capacity,

condition, or ability to act in making choices about flexible work arrangements" (Myers et al., 2012, p. 198).

Pedersen and Jeppesen (2012) show how schedule flexibility has a direct positive influence on workers' ability to prioritize and engage in personal roles during various life stages, and any positive effect that is indirectly generated cannot only be transferred to work, but also influences work attitude and performance over the duration of one's career. Their findings also indicate that schedule flexibility, by means of the room for agency it offers workers, may generate psychological resources, particularly self-efficacy and feelings of control, from the perception of being able to shape one's own surroundings. The perception of flexibility in the timing and location of work was also found to result in less difficulty with work-family balance, and in the ability to work longer hours before work-family balance becomes difficult (Hill et al., 2001). For many workers, such feelings of positive effects that spill over into the work domain have a positive impact on their work environment and performance. In this way, flexibility is seen as a boundary-spanning or what Pedersen and Jeppesen (2012) refer to as a "contagious" (p. 355) resource that, irrespective of its origin, can benefit both work and personal life. This view of flexibility illustrates how flexible work practices contribute to work-life integration and boundary management and offer individuals the opportunity to manage their own time across their work and personal lives as their needs change.

Flexible work policies have become a critical component in many organizations and in organizational literature where they are promoted as a liberating force freeing individuals from their time-constraints (Breedveld, 1998); however, Leslie and

colleagues (2012) caution that such practices may be coupled with career costs. Cooper and Baird (2015) provide one such example in their study of Australian workers. The authors explain how requests for flexible arrangements typically involve a move from full-time to part-time hours and are most often made by mothers returning from maternity leave. Further, Leslie et al. (2012) maintain that when employees choose to use flexible work practices offered by the employer, the reason given for requesting such practices is important. Supervisors and managers interpret employees' use of flexible work more positively when the employer indicates a desire to use policies for productivity purposes rather than for personal demands (Leslie et al., 2012). Such research suggests that a request for flexible work may signal low commitment and may lead to long-term career penalties, indicating perceptual differences between so called *quality of life* and *family supportive* programs (Myers et al., 2012) and those designed based on job characteristics or to help facilitate coordination and scheduling (e.g., distributed and global work teams). Other organizational scholars also highlight the potentially negative personal consequences for employees (Leslie et al., 2012; Putnam et al., 2013; Van Dyne et al., 2007). Finally, Tietze and Musson (2002) maintain that although flexible work may unite different cultural spheres (i.e., home and work), it also introduces organizational temporalities into the private realm. As these authors describe, these blurred temporalities "vie for power and control, colliding, competing and collapsing into one another in some homes, rigidly separated in others" (p. 330).

In light of these conflicting findings, a number of studies continue to recommend the use of flexible work practices (Cooper & Baird, 2015; Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012;

Trougakos et al., 2014;); and others recommend the need for more complex theories that might specify the conditions under which flexible work may be most likely to have negative consequences (Leslie et al., 2012). A temporal perspective on flexible arrangements may help to resolve these inconsistencies by examining flexibility as a temporal affordance, as well as further define important distinctions between individuals' varying desires for flexibility across one's career and practices resulting from structural constraints. More specifically, a temporal perspective is sensitive to changes across the lifespan as well as changes across time for a given individual or group. Therefore, the third research question proposed for this dissertation is:

> *RQ3: What work-based strategies do individuals use to enact flexibility across the life-span?*

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The review of literature provided here demonstrates why conflating unstable and temporary arrangements with flexible work has become problematic. In the following chapter, the research methodology employed in this study to examine the complexities of these concepts will be explained. Chapter Three then highlights significant findings from qualitative interviews in an effort to explore the underlying temporal nature of the contemporary work environment and the time scales associated with individuals' flexible norms and practices. Finally, Chapter Four will summarize major findings supporting the need for a temporal perspective of organizational flexibility. An understanding of how individuals cope with and communicate about their professional identities from a temporal perspective will benefit both organizations and employees in their daily work and personal interactions.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology

To explore the complexities of organizational flexibility and the temporal practices individuals use to enact work-based flexibility, a five month qualitative study was conducted with 44 interview participants. This chapter will begin by outlining the rationale for the study's design. Following this discussion is an explanation of the selection of participants, and the approaches used for data collection and analysis.

The review of literature in Chapter 1 demonstrated the widespread use of the term *flexibility* in reference to a variety of work arrangements and organizational practices. As the primary research instrument, I recognized that I also possessed my own unique interpretations and perceptions. Thus, decisions regarding the research design were aimed to both recognize multiple interpretations while prioritizing the meanings ascribed by individual participants in an effort to disentangle related constructs. Given this focus on meaning and the translation of meaning into practice, the research design and analysis of data were framed from a constructionist perspective. Constructionism makes the claim that meanings are constructed as we engage with one another and with the world we are interpreting (Crotty, 2010); ideas are not developed in isolation, but as part of a larger social context.

In the process of creating meaning, individuals rely heavily on their experiences of talking, relating, and interacting with others making the qualitative aspect of this study an important element. This emphasis on context and meaning creation as it occurs when individuals interact in interpersonal settings is similar to the formation of meaning that transpires between a researcher and participant (Crotty, 2010). This highlights the need to

engage participants in conversation rather than employ survey methods which limit interaction between the investigator and the object of study. Further, a constructionist perspective recognizes the possibility of multiple interpretations of reality (Creswell & Miller, 2000), all equally valid, as well as differences in associations of the same concept both between and within groups. For example, participants in this study referred to "flexibility" as the characteristic of being adaptable to change (e.g., changes in work flow or process), and also in terms of scheduling personal and work-related activities. It is for this reason this study examined: (1) the descriptions individuals used to articulate the need and desire for flexibility; as well as (2) the actual work – and career-related practices individuals employ to act upon this need and desire.

Crotty (2010) maintains all knowledge and all meaningful reality is contingent upon human practice. How we view a particular concept is constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and is also developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. Constructionism is definitive in the belief there is no true or valid interpretation; there are only useful interpretations (Crotty, 2010). Consistent with Crotty's assertions, this study aims to initiate an understanding of work-based flexibility that allows organizational communication scholars to more realistically assess its benefits and outcomes, to examine the realities for those engaged in flexible work practices, and to better distinguish flexible work arrangements from flexible careers. Finally, Crotty (2010) also highlights the need for the researcher to keep sustained attention on the object of the research by not remaining "straitjacketed" (p. 51) by the conventional meanings we have been taught to associate with the object of study, but

instead to be open during all phases of inquiry to the potential for new and deeper meanings. This invitation to reinterpretation, and therefore, a clearer and more practical understanding of flexibility remained a primary goal of this study.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Qualitative researchers have many techniques from which to choose to examine individuals and organizations. While traditional or more structured methods are used to explore everyday experiences, these methods may not provide a complete picture. Further, Polkinghorne (1988) maintains there is a need for any study of human behavior to include an exploration of the meaning systems that form human experience. For these reasons, researchers often look to narrative inquiry to better understand and explain both people and events. It is through narratives that individuals gain an understanding of the actions of others (Fisher, 1989).

Narrative knowing is that which is learned from stories. The knowledge gained from the solicitation of story as an interviewing method has long been accepted as a practical alternative to the dominant view that formal science is the only acceptable method for gaining legitimate knowledge (Lyotard, 1979; Polkinghorne, 1988). The theory of narratology maintains that everything has a narrative aspect or at the least can be perceived and interpreted as narrative (Bal, 1997). While other researchers have warned against such a broad perspective (Gabriel, 2000), narrative methods have remained as a logical foundation for examining stories for the purpose of determining whether or not individuals' accounts can be accepted as a basis for decision or action. Human beings are storytellers by nature, with people ordinarily explaining their own

actions and the actions of others by means of a story or plot (Polkinghorne, 1988). Because these narrative explanations are contextually specific, they are essentially different in form from formal scientific explanations.

There are many elements of narrative that make it especially appropriate when the focus of study is on individuals' lived experiences. When explaining the nuances of human lives, storytelling is sensemaking; life is seen as a plot enacted over time (McAdams, 2006). Stories by nature also involve characters. As the storyline develops, we learn more about what characters want, what they intend to do, and the specific actions they take to either acquire something desired, or to avoid something undesirable over time (McAdams, 2006). To have a story as McAdams (2006) argues, you need a motivated character whose efforts to achieve some end (e.g., control time, adapt a work schedule, etc.) are blocked in some way (e.g., spatial constraints, organizational policy, etc.). Soliciting a story from research participants to explain this experience, as Jacobs (2002) suggests, gives the researcher the opportunity to focus on which events are selected for narration as well as those that are omitted. Bal (1997) claims this emphasis on the way events are presented reveals not just the storyteller's narrative style, but may give insight into the narrator's view of life.

The narrative approach to interviewing taken in this study will addresses the multiple perspectives and time scales needed to examine flexibility in work and careers, and becomes critical to supporting our understanding of flexibility as a temporal construct. Abbott (2002) maintains that the "fundamental gift of narrative" is that it is the principle way in which our species organizes its understanding of time (p. 3). Narrative

time, according to Abbott's view, alters the traditional modes of organizing time into a process by which events and incidents themselves create the order of time. This focus on events during data collection moved conversations with participants beyond the clock- and calendar-time that so often frames discussions of the work day to *epochal* (Bluedorn, 2002) or event-related (e.g., job changes, career movement, etc.) time that better encompasses the temporal focus of this study. Further, the inclusion of future-focused career thinking and problem-solving facilitated the analysis of efforts to enact flexibility across the lifespan.

Soliciting story as a method of inquiry also allows the researcher to "restory" (Fisher, 1989) participant accounts by taking small segments of interview data and providing causal links among ideas (Creswell, 2007). This is done to give the story a clear beginning, middle, and an end; similar to the basic elements found in good novels. This linear story design is also the way many individuals describe and attempt to make sense out of their career movement and development. Each small movement, from one job, position, or location to another, represents small events that when taken together generate greater meaning (Fisher, 1989; Polster, 1987). Therefore, the resulting analysis of interview data becomes both a description of the story as well as the themes that emerge from it (Polster, 1987).

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Given the nature of the study and the need to include individuals from various occupational backgrounds, a nonprobability purposive sample was used. Recruitment of interview participants began with a convenience sample (Robinson, 2014) made up of

individuals known to the principle researcher, and selected based on personal knowledge of the participant, their occupation, and work practices (e.g., age, years of service, telecommuting, etc.). This initial participant pool served two primary goals. First, I wanted to address flexibility from the standpoint of individuals primarily employed in professional, white-collar positions with organizational relationships that typify the standard, full-time, permanent employment sector discussed in Chapter 1; or what is commonly considered the "flip side" of insecure or precarious work (Siegmann & Schiphorst, 2016, p. 114). In doing so, the hope was that study findings would demonstrate how occupations and organizations have become more fluid and open to frequent change (Osnowitz, 2010) and how flexibility underpins various types of employees and employment relationships.

Second, by moving away from relying on a singular research site or occupational group, the research design responds to Cappelli and Keller's (2013a) assertion that changes in the workforce have blurred distinctions between individuals in various organizational relationships. For example, a short-term or contract employee might work onsite at the client's location, while a full-time, standard employee can work permanently offsite (in a home office, for example). Recruitment was not meant to create a stratified representative sample for comparison purposes, but rather to ensure a sample that was inclusive of members of various occupational groups and diverse perspectives. I also believed it was important to ensure specific categories of individuals, such as those working remotely, for their ability to offer an important perspective on flexible work (Robinson, 2014). Given the difficulty in making such distinctions within organizations

and between occupational groups, a purposive sampling method ensured responses from individuals most appropriate for the specific elements and goals of the study (Babbie, 2013; Robinson, 2014).

The consideration of age as it relates to career development over time was another important factor guiding participant selection. McAdams (2006) suggests midlife adults are often more aware of their professional achievements and influence regarding their own career development and trajectory, but still young enough to have goals for the future. Older adults as opposed to entry-level workers, are typically better able to address the challenges of balancing the roles of spouse, parent, and grandparent with organizational roles and responsibilities. This indicates the potential for distinct differences between individuals in describing the need and desire for flexibility based on age as well as their ability to enact flexibility throughout the career, thus addressing the timescale component of the study. A purposive sample facilitated the inclusion of participants from various age ranges, individuals representing extreme cases (e.g., entrepreneurs and virtual employees), and others that might be considered typical or average organizational members exemplifying characteristics of the general population.

Additional participants were then recruited using snowball sampling, a method designed to generate new participants by asking individuals to identify others like themselves (Babbie, 2013). The snowball method served both to assist in overcoming difficulties in locating study participants, but also presented opportunities to build upon interesting responses regarding attributes of individuals (Babbie, 2013) with the addition of new participants. For example, for standard employees working offsite, the

development and maintenance of social and communication networks becomes a central aspect of ongoing career development, maintenance, and satisfaction. The case of Bruce, a software consultant, is a relevant illustration of this finding. Bruce explained how he leverages his work in order to be able to *work anywhere* (i.e., for any organization and/or from any location), and how he used his personal network to facilitate movement from one role or location to another. Given the strength of his network, Bruce was valuable in recommending others with similar job types as potential study participants. This allowed me to further explore the significance of social networks during subsequent interviews.

New participants were continuously added until saturation; noting data replication and redundancy in interview question responses and a lack of new insights (Bowen, 2008). This was determined through constant comparison of both interview transcripts and field notes to identify instances of findings that fit into categories already established by previous interviews. While there is no agreed upon rule for determining saturation, Bowen (2008) describes theoretical saturation as a consequence of theoretical sampling, and suggests the saturation of all categories signifies the point at which to end the research. In this process, the researcher is "not seeking generalizability or representativeness and focuses less on sample size and more on sampling adequacy" (p. 140). Thus, an *appropriate* sample for this study was composed of participants who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic. Table 1 provides a summary of the researcher-generated pseudonym, age range, and job title of each study participant.

Table 1: Summary of Research Participants

Pseudonym	Age Range	Job Title
Donald	35-44	Chief Technology Officer
Ryan	35-44	Dentist/Hotel Owner/Developer
Linda	35-44	Pharmacist
Adam	35-44	Physician
Monica	45-54	Registrar
Lisa	35-44	Petroleum Analyst
Stephanie	35-44	Hotel Owner/Developer
Caroline	35-44	Licensed Professional Counselor
John	55-64	Sr. Project Manager
Evelyn	35-44	Coding Manager
Thomas	22-34	Pharmacy Area Manager
Nicole	22-34	Clinical Pharmacist
Bruce	55-64	Consultant
Howard	45-54	Program Manager
Theresa	35-44	Senior Engineer
Kristina	45-54	Conference Planner
Lori	22-34	Catering/Restaurant Manager
Rachel	45-54	Financial Aid Supervisor
Tina	35-44	Elementary Teacher
Paula	55-64	Travel/Real Estate Agent
Kathy	22-34	Account Manager
Diane	45-54	Administrator
Randy	35-44	Associate Professor
Jason	35-44	Quality Assurance Manager
Tony	45-54	Sr. Director/Quality Assurance
Crystal	45-54	Hypnotist/Wellness Consultant
Seth	45-54	Engineering Director
Julia	35-44	Professor
Emily	45-54	Sr. Customer Success Manager
Cameron	45-54	Pipeline Automation Specialist
Paul	55-64	Sr. Talent Manager
Robin	55-64	Inside Sales Manager
Victoria	35-44	Sr. Client Services Director

Table 1: Summary of Research Participants Continued

Pseudonym	Age Range	Job Title
Carmen	35-44	Professor
Kerri	35-44	Research Scientist
Charlotte	35-44	Relator
Ellen	35-44	Professor
Carlos	22-34	Professor
Russell	35-44	Co-Chief Executive Officer
Karla	22-34	Chief Executive Officer
Victor	45-54	Civil Engineer
Elaine	22-34	Acquisitions Editor
Craig	35-44	Business Owner
Jeremy	35-44	Automation Engineer

DATA COLLECTION

A primary aim of this study is to explore the variety of ways in which flexibility is discussed and enacted in work and careers, and to better understand individual work- and career-related sensemaking and behavioral patterns. Likewise, it is important to engage individuals directly regarding their experiences as a method of revealing such practices. The use of qualitative interviews through narrative inquiry as the primary data gathering tool was used to accommodate these issues. Qualitative interviews offer the opportunity to involve participants in a discussion that is framed around a general plan of inquiry, while eliminating the need for a standardized list of questions (Babbie, 2013).

Data collection involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each study participant averaging 20-35 minutes. The interview format followed Merriam's (2009) recommendations when specific information is desired from all participants, (i.e., a more

structured section), as well as a larger section guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored. This format allowed me to include basic demographic information in my analysis, and to examine ideas emerging during the interview. The semi-structured interview format facilitated the gathering of specific information or interpretation and a better understanding of organizational flexibility; a concept impossible to comprehend through observation (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). Given this focus, interviews were conversational, and included the use of probing questions to clarify and refine the interpretation of information provided by participants (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). The ability to probe, i.e., a response to a sense that the participant has revealed something significant and there is more to be gained, is one of the advantages of the researcher serving as the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam, 2009). Basic demographic information (age, occupation, and years of service) was obtained from each participant, and the interview guide consisted of the following questions:

- Describe for me your typical work day.
- How much control would you say you have over structuring your time during the work day?
- What was your professional role five years ago and tell me how that orients/relates to what you are doing today?
- Is there a particular reason you sought out the type of work you do currently?
- Where do you see your career in the next 5 years? 10 years?
- Do you foresee any obstacles in getting where you ultimately want to be professionally?
- What do you enjoy most about your current job?
- What is your least favorite aspect of your current job?
- What, if any, issues do you encounter managing your time during a typical work day? What role does technology play?

Interviews were conducted with 44 professionals from various industries and occupational levels. Interviews took place primarily face-to-face, with a few by telephone, and were conducted in each person's place of business or home. Interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim to preserve all interview data for analysis (Merriam, 2009) with the exception of 4 participants who asked not to be recorded. In these cases, detailed field notes were taken. Although professional transcription (rather than researcher-transcribed data) has the potential to cause the researcher to lose familiarity with data during the collection period (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2016), audio recording interviews followed by transcription performed by a third-party allowed me to focus my attention on engaging in conversation with participants rather than on transcription. This also offered me the opportunity to take an active role in guiding participants in expanding their stories, examples, and personal accounts. After each interview additional notes were taken regarding initial ideas and revelations that seemed particularly salient to the purpose and goals of the study (Bowen, 2008). I returned to my notes after subsequent interviews for comparison purposes and to reflect on responses after time had passed; a process that allowed me to better determine when saturation was reached.

Another advantage of the conversational style of semi-structured interviews and verbatim transcription is in the ability to obtain thick description for analysis. Thick description creates *verisimilitude* (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129), a quality in the data resulting from specific statements made by respondents that helps in explaining the feelings they have experienced, or could experience, and the events being described in a

study for the researcher. As Creswell and Miller (2000) explain, the goal is to transport the reader of a narrative account into a setting or situation by providing as much detail as possible in the report of the study's results and findings. This level of detail is an important element in narrative inquiry and a common procedure for researchers employing a constructionist perspective (Creswell & Miller, 2000). By describing a small portion of interaction, for example, the reader is able to identify with individuals in specific situations. This level of description assists readers in viewing and understanding the account as credible, thus enabling readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings or similar contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Finally, it is important to situate the narrative element within the study design and data collection. Storytelling inherently involves a relationship between a *teller* and an *audience*; and what is heard is influenced by participants' feelings about the encounter and his or her expectations regarding what is appropriate or *tellable* in given moment and setting (McAdams, 2006). For this reason, considerations were taken to prevent certain biases and sensitivities from influencing the data collection process during interviews. First, probing included subtle rather than direct solicitations of story (e.g., *"Tell me more about that.," "What led you to…?," or "Can you give me an example of…?"*); and I was careful not to use the words *flexibility* or *flexible work* during conversations with participants to avoid leading their account or descriptions of actions and events in a particular direction. Likewise, because early participants were selected based on my personal knowledge of their work role and job design, I also recognized the influence this familiarity might have on their behaviors and question responses during the interview.

For example, I noted several instances when interviewees remarked *"I hope I helped with what you were looking for"* or "*I hope I gave good answers"* at the conclusion of the interview. Therefore, I relied heavily on specific methods in my analysis of interview data to account for my own preconceptions, expectations, and feelings. These issues are discussed further below.

DATA ANALYSIS

Several options exist for analyzing data collected in a narrative study. The analysis for this study followed the path of Sahlestein, Maquire, and Timmerman (2009) by using a series of coding procedures to work through interview transcripts; making notes and comments to uncover logical connections between ideas and derive codes and categories to capture major themes (i.e., perceptions, explanations, and behavioral patterns) of relevance to the study. Initial analysis began by both reading the transcripts thoroughly and making note of data that seemed interesting or potentially relevant to the study (Merriam, 2009), as well as a process of disconfirming evidence (Bowen, 2008). Disconfirming evidence involves establishing preliminary themes or categories in a study and then searching through the data for evidence that is consistent with or disconfirms these themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The decision to begin here was in recognition of my own background, experience, and personal knowledge of initial study participants and the influence these assumptions may have had on my interpretation of interview responses, or what Cunliffe (2003) refers to as *self-reflexivity*. Further, self-reflexivity is also consistent with the constructionist approach underlining the research purpose and design (Bowen, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000). This constant construction of meaning

and social realities occurs even as I interacted with participants about their experiences, (Crotty, 2010; Cunliffe, 2003) and disconfirming evidence helped in providing further support of the credibility of participants' accounts by recognizing multiple and complex interpretations (Bowen, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The next stages of inquiry involved more focused data analysis. I made the decision to use a combination of basic coding methods as the primary approach to data analysis (Saldaña, 2016). I began by employing Structural Coding; relying solely on the research questions to locate and identify content and phrases from interview data that related to one of the three specific research questions framing the study (Saldaña, 2016). At a basic level, this method allowed me to both code and categorize data focused and framed by specific research questions rather than use more exploratory methods. It also allowed me to quickly determine frequencies by noting the number of individual participants who referred to a particular theme (Saldaña, 2016). This numerical data could then be analyzed, by age range or years of employment in a particular profession, for example, to examine differences. Such findings are crucial in discussions of timescale. For instance, it became apparent during this phase of analysis that older individuals with many years of service in a particular profession were better prepared and able to negotiate flexibility in job design.

Further analysis sought to focus on specific words and phrases from participants to assist in identifying themes or common threads running through the data (Richards & Morse, 2007). Examining extended phrases and sentences from interview transcripts helped reveal what a unit of data was about and/or what it meant in relationship to the

research questions and this *themeing* of data was an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytical reflection (Richards & Morse, 2007; Saldaña, 2016). Naturally, I derived some initial themes from reflection during data collection, with the process continuing through early analysis. Saldaña (2016), however, cautions that themes do not simply emerge, but are a product of interpretation.

Although Structural Coding offers the ability to draw conclusions from collected coded segments, I also wanted to glean other levels of insight. For this reason, *open-coding* by In Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2016) was used in combination with the first approach. In Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2016, p. 105) involves relying on actual words and short phrases used by participants found in the qualitative data record. This choice was made because of a focus on prioritizing each individual's voice and a desire to ensure as much as possible resulting interpretations were participant- rather than researcher-generated (Saldaña, 2016). Directly related to the goals of this study, In Vivo Coding is responsive to capturing individuals' behaviors and processes which helped reveal how organizational members contemplate issues and work to resolve basic problems (Saldaña, 2016).

More specifically, the individual desire for flexibility and engagement in flexible work practices is often in response to temporal dilemmas and blurred work-life boundaries (Hill et al., 2001; Leslie et al., 2012; Myers et al., 2012; Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012). Analysis at this level involved, for example, evaluating the descriptions of temporal demands and the resulting action taken (e.g., negotiating a different work schedule or seeking other employment). Capturing respondents' specific accounts,

particularly in narrative form, helped to preserve meanings of not just how individuals view a problem, but how they arrived at the actions taken to help resolve the issue (Saldaña, 2016). In Vivo Coding also provided yet another safe method for overcoming preconceived biases in the data (Saldaña, 2016). A summary of the data analysis methods used is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Data Analysis Summary

Coding Scheme	Data	General Purpose	Outcomes
Disconfirming Evidence	Interview transcripts, Field notes	Search of data for consistent or conflicting evidence of preliminary established themes	Identified various perspectives of themes and/or categories; Developed preliminary summary of major findings
Structural Coding	Interview transcripts, Participant demographics	Identify segments of data related to specific research questions	Determined frequencies of particular themes; Enabled comparisons between individual participants
Open – In Vivo Coding	Interview transcripts	Explore problem-solving behaviors through analysis of participants' voices (i.e., words and phrases)	Identified temporal demands and problem-solving behaviors

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Changing patterns of work have become the focus for research in both formal and informal sectors. Attention has been given to organizational policies and the relative importance of flexible work arrangements to organizational members. This chapter outlined the qualitative approach taken to explore the temporal implications and intricacies of flexible work from the perspective of these members. Given this focus, efforts were taken during data collection to prioritize the voices of participants. In the next chapter, participant responses are used to assist in framing their experiences with the goal of addressing basic questions about temporal flexibility that remain unresolved. To this end, the framework and study design aim to explore flexible work and careers using a research agenda that is both sensitive to the multiple perspectives and time scales needed to examine the complexities of these arrangements.

Chapter Three: Results

The three research questions framing this study asked: (1) How do individuals describe the need or desire for flexibility? (2) How do individuals negotiate work-based flexibility within organizations? and (3) What work-based strategies do individuals use to enact flexibility across the lifespan? Findings indicate participants have a preference for controlling segments of the work day and perceive psychological and professional benefits from choosing *when* work is accomplished. Evidence also demonstrates participants are open to take on the role of active agents in securing flexible work arrangements by working both within existing organizational structures as well as mapping their own long-term career trajectory through less conventional means.

Transcribed interviews resulted in 239, single-spaced pages of data. The initial analysis of interview data resulted in 32 codes and, after summarizing and condensing each of these codes, six distinct categories materialized. Table 3 provides a summary of prototypical quotes related to each of the major themes identified. This chapter will explore these themes within a discussion of each research question. Specific segments from narrative interviews are recounted with a goal of highlighting the experiences of participants while demonstrating the temporal nature of changes in the workflow, organization, and processes at both individual and organizational levels. Before beginning, it is important to emphasize a significant distinction that will help in framing the discussion that will follow. The terms f*lexible work, flexible work practices (FWPs),* and *flexible work arrangements (FWAs)* will be used in reference to organizational and individual attempts to manipulate the timing and/or location of work; while *flexible*

career(s) extends Sullivan and Baruch's (2009) definition from Chapter 1 to encompass attempts at altering the timing of both work-related and other professional experiences over the lifespan.

Table 3: Thematic Categories and Prototypical Quotes

Identified Theme	Prototypical Quote
Flexibility facilitates focused work	*A lot of the things that I do take a little bit of a thought process and a certain duration. Starting and stopping just makes it go longer. This way [working from home] I can just count on quiet time. I get so much done in an hour. It's really beneficial. The company recognizes that as well.*
Accommodating competing demands	*I do like the fact that I can set my own schedule for the most part. I have the flexibility to just say if I have an hour in my day and one of my kids has something going on at school, I can go watch that activity at school. Then come back and do the work again.*
Flexibility provides a sense of control & autonomy	*My time is pretty much…I can do whatever I want. Spend it kind of however I want. I'm given these broad tasks and told this is what we need you to do. Then as long as I'm compliant in meeting the deadlines then pretty much I'm left alone.*
Changing Organizational Perceptions	*I have a supervisor that understands. I can pick up the phone and say, "Hey, today I need to leave at four o'clock. I need to take a half day in the morning to get the kids to the doctor. I need to work on a different project or work at a different location today." She's open to that.*
Changing career patterns for long-term flexibility	*Retiring from federal service and doing this, although I am still doing a lot of work, it certainly isn't as much as I did before. I consider that I am setting my own times. I am choosing the business that I want.*
Flex*time* vs. Flex*place*	*What's interesting, when I say easier from the standpoint that I'm not constrained by being in an office from eight to five. I have an office here. I have staff here, so I do go in the office. I go in the office two to three days a week. I can even then adjust my time based on traffic to be at the office early, leave late, etc. …it takes away the anxiety.*

RQ1: Describing the Need and Desire for Flexibility

In this section, participant – and researcher-generated reflections are used to address the first research question related to the need and desire for flexibility. As noted in Chapter 2, I avoided introducing the word *flexibility* in conversations with participants; however, the concept and explicit use of the term was quickly raised as a topic in a large majority of interviews. Consistent with previous research (Hill, et al., 2001; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009; Leslie et al., 2012; Putnam et al., 2014), many employees enjoy flexible work arrangements, and results from this study demonstrate flexible work is pervasive across various occupational types and levels. Overwhelmingly, participants discussed flexible work in positive terms with findings supporting the perception and experience of organizational flexibility as a *temporal affordance*.

Interview responses support a narrative of flexibility as an attractive feature of organizational life. Responses were heavily focused on the many benefits received from organizational flexibility, with very few mentioning perceived challenges and/or limitations. Without prompting, individuals were quick to address personal demands and the need and desire for flexibility in choosing the when and where of work. Specifically, interviewees described how flexible arrangements accommodate a need for increased focus on work tasks, the ability to manage and cope with competing demands, and the desire for autonomy and control. Figure 1 reflects the initial codes leading to the three thematic categories related to RQ1, and is followed by an analysis of each of the categories identified. Identification involved analyzing interview transcripts for segments related to RQ1 and noting: (1) an explicit reference to flexibility, and (2) frequencies of

analogous terms (e.g., adaptability); and then refining clusters of codes into related categories.

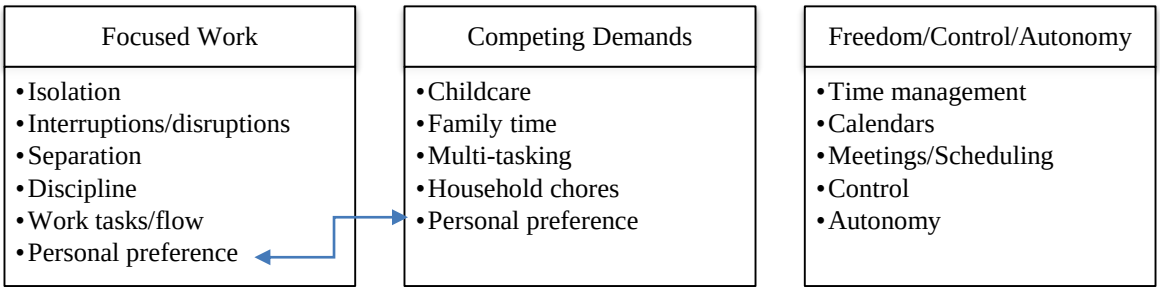

Figure 1: Identified Codes for RQ1

Flexibility Facilitates Focused Work

Flexible work arrangements, for many individuals in this study, were described as an attractive feature because they offer the ability to create and maintain an environment conducive to the successful completion of work tasks. Because organizations typically allow employees in flexible arrangements to work offsite, usually from home, individuals can create a workspace that is void of the usual office commotion and social interactions. This ability to create physical and psychological protection against interruptions and distractions during the work day, or what is referred to as *separation* (Ballard & Seibold, 2003), is a desirable quality facilitating focused work and productivity. John, a Senior Project Manager, described why he prefers working from home rather than onsite:

> It's because I'm uninterrupted. That's the biggest thing. I still get phone calls. I still get the problems that come in and the emails and so on. The distractions of all the people in the office and plus, being the department head, the distractions of all the other issues that come up, it's just not as efficient. A lot of the things that I do

> take a little bit of a thought process and a certain duration. Starting and stopping just makes it go longer. This way I can just count on quiet time. I get so much done in an hour. It's really beneficial. The company recognizes that as well.

Separation affords the ability to avoid the fragmentation that is often typical of flexible work. Fragmentation refers to working on tasks discontinuously (Rubin, 2007), or the "starting and stopping" to which John referred. Fragmentation alone, however, is often not the greatest concern. The *disruption cost* (Mark, Gudith, & Klocke, 2008) is what is most relevant. It is not just the time lost, but the time that must be taken to refocus on the interrupted task after the interruption is handled. This is then coupled with the experience of higher workload, stress, and frustration (Mark et al., 2008) as individuals deal with what they perceive as a loss of efficiency. By avoiding these disruptions in the work flow, individuals feel they can be more productive. Achieving this separation becomes about controlling the temporal features of work. Interruptions and disturbances are viewed as "wastes of time"; therefore, leading to a loss of productivity.

Offsite work can also entail being able to choose the timing of work and the choice to work when an individual *feels* they are most productive. As one participant explained:

> I decided to schedule I think four and half hours Mondays and Wednesdays in the morning when I'm at my freshest. Occasionally, somebody will call me that I just can't say no to. Largely, I tell people you can look at my calendar. I'm booked at that time. That's been really successful. It's helped a lot.

Although simple at its surface, this quote illustrates several attempts at controlling the temporal features of work. First, the respondent references a biological time orientation (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995)— "when I'm at my freshest". This implies a preference for work during one's *critical time* (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995) of day when energy is at its highest. There is also the attempt to block this time by formalizing or *scheduling* it on the calendar (Ballard & Seibold, 2003), while at the same time using the calendar as a tool for *separation.*

Likewise, Ryan, working three days each week from his home office, described how he chooses to handle mundane tasks during traditional work hours (8am-5pm) while reserving his evenings for items requiring more focused attention:

> For me, I just find I'm more productive when the world is asleep. I'm a night person, I like to work at night after hours when everything shuts down. I feel like I'm inundated with emails [during the day]. I've got pretty much everything that's coming in to me is in my email box by five o'clock.

Again, we see attempts to respond to challenges by controlling the temporal features of work tasks. Ryan, recognizing what Richmond and McCroskey (1995) refer to as a *cycle shift*, chooses to take on more complicated tasks during evening hours when he feels more active and productive.

These quotes also demonstrate an interesting relationship between flexibility and separation made evident through the subsequent analysis of interview data. Many participants recognize the ability to eliminate distractions is also representative of personal factors that may make flexible work arrangements more attractive and increase

an individual's chances of success and satisfaction in a flexible work environment. The capacity to create and maintain a work environment that facilitates sustained focus is as much about having uninterrupted time as possessing an ability to implement "screening behaviors" (Ballard & Seibold, 2003, p. 387). Screening behaviors include simple actions taken to preserve blocks of time for work activities, such as blocking calls and closing an office door, to more technological screening such as changing one's online status to "away". Charlotte, a Real Estate agent, described these behaviors as being "intentional" about one's day when she said: "Almost like, okay, don't talk to me right now. I have to go to the bathroom. I only have three minutes to get back to here, so I'm very intentional."

Enacting separation and intentionality may also be thought of as having a *discipline* for flexible work. Seth, an Engineering Director, discussed the importance of self-awareness in recognizing one's own limitations. He works a typical 8-5 workday onsite, but has experienced both working from home and supervising remote workers.

> The distractions and some people don't work well, because they don't have the discipline to do their work. For me, I do more work from home because I don't have the distraction and can focus on what I'm doing. Instead of somebody coming in every five minutes and asking for something…Also, I'm a lot more focused. I can take a break if I want – play tennis or something. I think I like that flexibility right now.

By discipline, Seth is referring to the ongoing practice of creating and maintaining a productive work environment regardless of its physical location. Without such discipline,

flexibility can become problematic for both employee and employer. This may be useful in explaining the negative outcomes (e.g., stress, feelings of overload, etc.; Myers et al., 2012; Putnam et al., 2014) often associated with flexible work, and the work-home conflict resulting from an inability to manage work and household boundaries when working from home (Kreiner et al., 2009). The concept of discipline was raised once again by Stephanie when asked about how the tradeoff of handling household chores and errands during the work day had influenced her perspective of flexible work. Stephanie responded: "In a good way, absolutely. I do think that when you work from home and you have such incredible flexibility, it takes a lot of discipline."

Personality factors were also alluded to during conversations with Kerri, a research scientist who works almost exclusively from her home office and travels periodically to work onsite in another state, when she shared her feelings about what it takes to make flexibility work.

> I think with a lot of Type A, very focused and diligent, competitive individuals. Everybody works hard and strives and gets their work done. I think that flexibility is a perk, simply because everybody is doing what they should do. Today was a prime example. I went to a doctor's appointment. I just blocked out my calendar. It just said I was busy and went to my appointment and nobody knew it.

Tony, who has a similar role as a Senior Director of Quality Assurance also works from home and travels periodically to various company sites for visits. His comments reinforced the importance of discipline for flexible work and in avoiding boundary maintenance issues.

> You have the discipline to make sure you get in the time to do the work you need to do, right? You're not distracted by the things that are around at home. At the same time you got the discipline to know when to stop, because it's easy at home to work forever and not stop working.

The influence of personal factors on one's ability to manage flexible work arrangements was reinforced during discussions with participants who did not necessarily seek flexible work, but found themselves in a flexible arrangement. These participants referenced experiencing challenges with the discipline and behaviors required to solidify a workspace and environment that facilitated focused work further pointing to the connection between individual differences and a preference for flexible work designs. These included comments such as, "I haven't figured that out yet" and "I just haven't learned properly yet how to balance it all." These comments point to the significance of individual characteristics as a moderating factor on flexible work outcomes and satisfaction.

Flexibility to Accommodate Competing Demands

The growth of flexible work arrangements is in large part due to an increase in dual-income families with both men and women participating in the paid labor force, and a surge in the creation of work-family balance policies in response (Weeden, 2005). Organizational policies were aimed at helping employees manage competing demands. This type of work life is typically not viewed as ideal as referenced by Craig, a business owner who works remotely:

> Just because, while it's nice being in the house, it's also difficult. Not so much with the kids, but with the spouse. A lot of times people don't understand that even though you're home, you're still in your office, and you're still working. Just to go get some milk takes 15 minutes. No, it doesn't take 15 minutes. It takes 15 minutes to stop what I'm doing. 20 minutes to get there, get the milk, get back and then another 10 or 15 minutes to get back to where I was.

Craig's response represents a commonly cited issue with flexible work; however, his concerns were not shared among the majority of interview participants. Interview data supports a widespread rationale of flexible arrangements and the ability for workers to manage personal responsibilities while still being productive during the workday. The fragmentation (previously discussed) is related to a shift from the linear sequencing of work to a *layered-task* structure (Rubin, 2007). When the completion of tasks rather than clock-time determines the end point of work, the result is often an attempt to maximize productivity by *layering* activities or completing multiple tasks simultaneously (Rubin, 2007). Surprisingly, most respondents indicated a preference for managing work-home boundaries in this way. For example, Stephanie described how she integrates household chores into her workday:

> There are things that I do for the household that interject into my work hours while I'm in my home office, whether it be emptying the dishwasher, doing the laundry, running errands, or going to the grocery store and meal prep. Those things are interjected into different days depending on the day of the week.

Stephanie went on to explain how she also uses this temporal strategy to handle scheduled activities for her children, "…because of me being able to work from my cellphone while they're in volleyball or dance, I usually sit in the car and work from my car." Stephanie's description is indicative of choosing both the timing and the location of work and may seem like an inconvenient work style; but her sentiments were shared across both occupational type and gender. Whereas the benefits of layering tasks have been found to be stronger for women (Bailyn, 2006; Rubin, 2007), results from this study indicate this temporal structure is just as attractive for men and for similar reasons. Randy, for example, shared how he adjusts his work schedule in the office in order to accommodate child care needs. He stated, "Because I have kids, I typically see about my kids. Then once my kids are in bed, a lot of times, I will work a little bit more at night before going to bed." When asked about what would happen if his work schedule changed or he decided to take on a new position without scheduling flexibility, Randy explained, "Well, that's going to change a lot because I'm married with children. My wife works full-time, so this position allows for some flexibility in terms of being home when my children get home." Finally, Tony, the traveling Quality Assurance Director referenced earlier, echoed Randy's need to accommodate family scheduling:

> I do like the fact that I can set my own schedule for the most part. I have the flexibility to just say if I have an hour in my day and one of my kids has something going on at school, I can go watch that activity at school. Then come back and do the work again.

References to fragmentation described here seem to work for these individuals and participant comments demonstrate two additional components of Rubin's (2007) time layering structure. Although work tasks, childcare, and household chores may interrupt the workflow, they do not require the same skill or mental energy to complete; therefore, individuals may not feel *constrained* by activities that *contaminate* their work (Rubin, 2007). The time and mental energy expended for a routine household task or to attend a school activity may be seen as an acceptable tradeoff for the ability to manage competing activities during the workday.

Findings related to the need and desire for flexibility focus on individuals' concerns for productivity both in professional and personal realms. Participants revealed expectations and preferences for the ability to control portions of the work day while also contributing to the organization as a valued member. The positive outcomes are best summarized by Lisa, a Petroleum Analyst: "I've gotten so accustomed to it. There are a lot of pros that outweigh the cons, so hey, I do like this lifestyle better."

Flexibility Facilitates Control and Autonomy

Increasing demands created by changing patterns of work and family structures have led to a perception of time as important, but also scarce (Ballard & Webster, 2009). Temporal scarcity often contributes to feelings of overload and the need to be constantly connected or always "on". The ability to manipulate the timing and location of work by implementing alternative arrangements (e.g., telecommuting) is believed to ease these tensions, but can be met with difficulties. The image, however, of the overscheduled employee juggling multiple tasks in order to meet demands was the exception rather than

the norm for respondents in this study. Participants communicated a preference for the ability to make decisions about how they manage and structure their time during the work day. Individuals also expressed conflicts between organizational policies designed to dissuade constant connection and extended work hours (i.e., family friendly policies) and their own preferences for managing work tasks. For example: "I'm one of those obsessed about the emails. They actually encourage people not work in the evening. I just check my emails because I just kind of like to keep up with it," This demonstrates an awareness of how a need for constant connection is often an internal motivation with workers placing this expectation upon themselves. There were indications this may result from the availability of technology and the ability to be "at work" or "do work" from any given location. Caroline explained, when asked about the role of technology in facilitating her work flow: "The flexibility of having my work available on a laptop computer, anywhere that I can get on the Internet, I can log in and be productive and do good work." Caroline's comments demonstrate a desire for flexibility to handle work tasks during periods of time, whether at home or at work, she determines to be most convenient.

Many of the participants in this study echoed Caroline's comments and indicated a preference for control of their own time during the work day. This quality of autonomy in regulating work tasks and flow was captured by Bruce, a software consultant. Bruce's experiences are unique in that he works offsite from his home office in one state, and travels every other week to work on location in a different state. When asked about his typical work day, Bruce explained:

> My time is pretty much…I can do whatever I want. Spend it kind of however I want. I'm given these broad tasks and told this is what we need you to do. Then as long as I'm compliant in meeting the deadlines then pretty much I'm left alone.

Flexible work arrangements offer a level of autonomy and independence that became more apparent as individuals reflected upon their previous experiences in different organizational environments. These realizations were often the result of questions asked about why participants may have sought out a position or line of work and in exploring what they enjoyed the most and least about their current position. As Diane reflected on how she is now dealing with the loss of autonomy after being promoted to a new position in the same organization, she shared:

> I've lost a lot of autonomy in this position. That's probably what I think I like the least, right. I've never really had a boss. My supervisor was a colleague and just wanted me to do my best stuff. As long as you're doing it within these parameters, you do you, that's really empowering. I love that. I loved being in charge of my day completely.

This comparison is also evident in Ellen's response:

> I worked for a big public accounting firm. I liked it. I worked really hard. I worked a lot, but I probably worked less than I work now. I didn't feel like I had any control over my schedule. I didn't have any flexibility. I felt in that profession you're driven by the calendar.

Ellen referenced the calendar or *clock-time*; however, accounting as a profession is also epochal – or event-based (e.g., tax season). As an organizational member, she felt

pressured to adopt an accelerated work pace during peak periods of the year, yet ironically felt she was accomplishing less. Ellen, now a college professor and author, highlighted her perception of freedom and autonomy in accomplishing tasks offered by the flexible work arrangements made available in her new position. These comments represent the significance of organizational structure in navigating the flexible work environment. The next section will explore how individuals are working within these structures and learning to manage workplace norms to achieve the flexibility they desire.

RQ2: Negotiation Strategies & Changing Perceptions of Flexible Work

The second research question was aimed at revealing individuals' communication and negotiation strategies regarding work-based flexibility within organizations. Findings support changing perceptions related to the need and accommodations for flexible work arrangements even in the absence of formalized policies. This theme resulted from both structural and open-coding processes by first identifying specific references to negotiation strategies in interview data (for example, "I went to my supervisor…" or "I coordinated with my co-workers…"), and also observing mentions of participants' goal-related and problem-solving efforts (for example, "That's why I decided…" or "I wanted to be able to…"). Figure 2 reflects the codes revealed in the data leading to this theme.

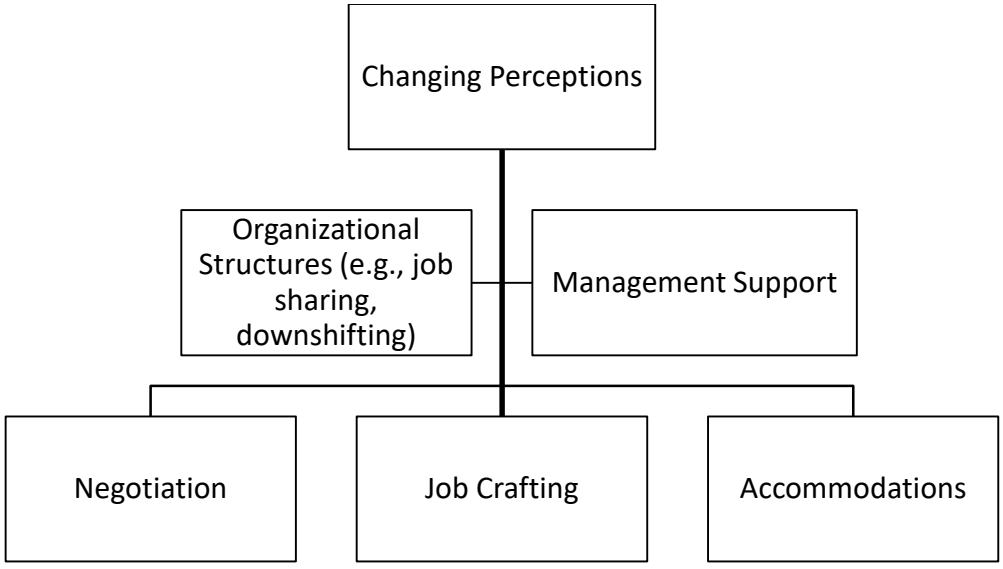

Figure 2: Identified Codes for RQ2

Organizations have made strides in establishing workplace flexibility initiatives, but the argument can be made that the onus of responsibility for attaining workplace flexibility, even with the presence of organizational policies, still rests with individual workers to determine when and if they are capable of carving out the flexibility they desire while also being viewed as a valuable organizational resource (Myers et al., 2012). For example, Leslie and colleagues (2012) found requests for changes in an employee's schedule to be perceived as a signal of low commitment when the request was made to accommodate personal life issues (e.g., childcare) rather than productivity. For this reason, employees have often been forced to make difficult choices about their professional lives in response to personal challenges. This was the case for Linda, a retail pharmacist, who explained how she sought to find a healthy balance with the shift work

required for her position: “Each shift is kind of inconvenient. That’s why I went back to part-time, actually. I’m working 20 hours a week.” Similarly, Rachel described her need to take the same path:

> I had a young child who was ill at the time. I felt bad that I was having to take time off from work. I didn’t want it to affect my relationship with my colleagues. I opted to move into a part-time position that would allow me to still focus on the issues at home and still bring in some income to the household.

Rachel and Linda decided to work within the existing organizational structure and *downshift* by actively stepping off the career ladder and choosing a path that allowed for more time for personal concerns. *Downshifting* allowed Rachel and Linda to make small, but significant changes in their career trajectory rather than completely altering their career paths (e.g., self-employment).

Additional responses, however, indicate potential shifts for employees and for organizational perceptions around flexible work. Whereas previous studies have reflected an organizational environment in which subtle messages may inhibit the use of flexible arrangements even when they are made available (Myers, et al., 2012), respondents in this study cited conversations with employers that were more accepting of the need for flexibility and an openness to engage in the necessary dialogue, helping to eliminate the stigma previously attached to requests for flexible work. Donald, Chief Technology Officer of a nation-wide fitness organization, described this as fostering a culture of “innovation” and “people’s desire to want to do a little bit more.” He stated:

> Obviously, people have lives. They have families, and they don't want to put a bookend on when work starts and stops. Once you form some of those partnerships and you form trust with it, I think people just understand that you're just a human being that has stuff to do as well...once you've formed those partnerships, people just get it.

Donald's comments are an indication of the significance of communication between supervisors and employees regarding the need and support for flexible work. Open communication is also crucial to clarifying employer perceptions in defining the temporal limits and setting boundary expectations. An employee's confidence in pursuing open communication with co-workers and supervisors when requesting flexible work may be useful in building the "trust" and "partnerships" Donald referenced.

Similarly, Diane explained, "The truth is, nobody expects that of me" when discussing her concern for "face time" at work, indicating the pressure to work extended hours and to be available 24/7 may be self-inflicted rather than the result of organizational policy. Diane's comments allude to the possibility of a set of individual factors and characteristics (e.g., assertiveness, sincerity, etc.) like those previously discussed that may be necessary when navigating the flexible work environment. Diane went on to recount how her supervisor was able to ease her concerns:

> I went to him and was like, "A*hh*!" He was like, "You need to stop skipping lunches. You need to know if you need to take an appointment, you need to go do that. You can do it during work hours because I know you're here late." It was

> instructive for me to realize that my schedule isn't as rigid as it was. Because of that, I have to take time when I need it. I'm still learning.

Diane's conversation with her supervisor reinforces the enactment of flexibility as an organizational benefit, but is also evidence of organizational control. "You can do it…because I know you're here late" gives her permission to exercise flexibility in handling personal demands during the workday by recognizing and rewarding the investment of time spent working late. These quotes demonstrate the importance of communicating the established temporal norms of the organization (i.e., the work practices and expectations of how employees spend their time and manage their tasks). Clarification may be helpful in reducing the sense of urgency and scarcity while giving individuals the freedom they desire to make choices during the work process.

Participants in this study were also open in sharing their efforts in establishing expectations in the absence of formalized policies and procedures and in navigating complex work relationships with supervisors and co-workers. For example, one participant explained how she was able to collaborate with co-workers to fill her void when absent: "I've taken the liberty to train my staff that I have there to be able to at least fill in for me." Another participant described how, after returning from part-time work to a full-time administrative position, she was able to effectively communicate her needs to her supervisor:

> I have a supervisor that understands. I can pick up the phone and say, "Hey, today I need to leave at four o'clock. I need to take a half day in the morning to get the

> kids to the doctor. I need to work on a different project or work at a different location today." She's open to that.

Finally, other interview responses indicate how individuals have successfully reinvented their work flow and processes to maximize flexibility in both the timing and the location of work. John, a Senior Project Manager, is employed in another unique work-from-home/periodic-travel position. Previously, John worked onsite at his company's headquarters; but currently works from a home office each week and commutes out of state once each month to supervise large construction projects. John shared how he negotiated this new work design based on his desire to move to another state while continuing in his position remotely:

> I'm the first one that has done that with this company. There was a lot of skepticism I'm sure when we decided to do this, that I wasn't 100% sure that it would work. The company wasn't 100% sure that it would work. We both agreed that it was definitely worth trying.

These findings provide relevant examples of employees, responding to a need and desire for flexibility, who have taken on an active role in establishing flexible arrangements to meet both personal and professional needs. Individuals expressed feeling more open to create opportunities for flexibility in the timing and scheduling of work, and positive responses from co-workers and supervisors indicate such accommodations are not always perceived as a threat. The analysis of the themes presented thus far provided interesting insights in examining the first two research questions. In the analysis of RQ3, however, a more complete picture of flexible work and careers emerged. More specifically, distinct

career patterns were uncovered through the examination of interview transcripts combined with participant demographics (e.g., age, position, and number of years in position) that help in explaining the enactment of flexibility across the lifespan. These patterns will be explored further in the following section.

RQ3: Building and Maintaining the Flexible Career

Taking into account the need and desire for flexibility and the positive shifts in expectations on the part of both supervisors and employers expressed by participants in this study, it appears many individuals in various occupations have realized both personal and professional benefits in flexible work arrangements. What becomes complicated, however, is uncovering how to best distinguish flexible *work* from the flexible *career*. Findings related to the work-based strategies individuals use to enact long-term career flexibility, the study's third research question, revealed interesting conclusions related to this distinction. Analysis revealed two specific patterns of career behavior: the *portfolio,* originally proposed by Gratton and Scott (2016); and *extreme telecommuting,* a concept resulting from participant responses in this study. Both of these patterns extend flexible arrangements beyond those designed for balance in the domains of work and home (Kreiner et al., 2009) and offer opportunities for flexibility across the lifespan. Figure 3 demonstrates how the analysis of data related to RQ3 moved beyond description and summary towards synthesis in order to better depict the interrelationship between these concepts as well as those discussed previously.

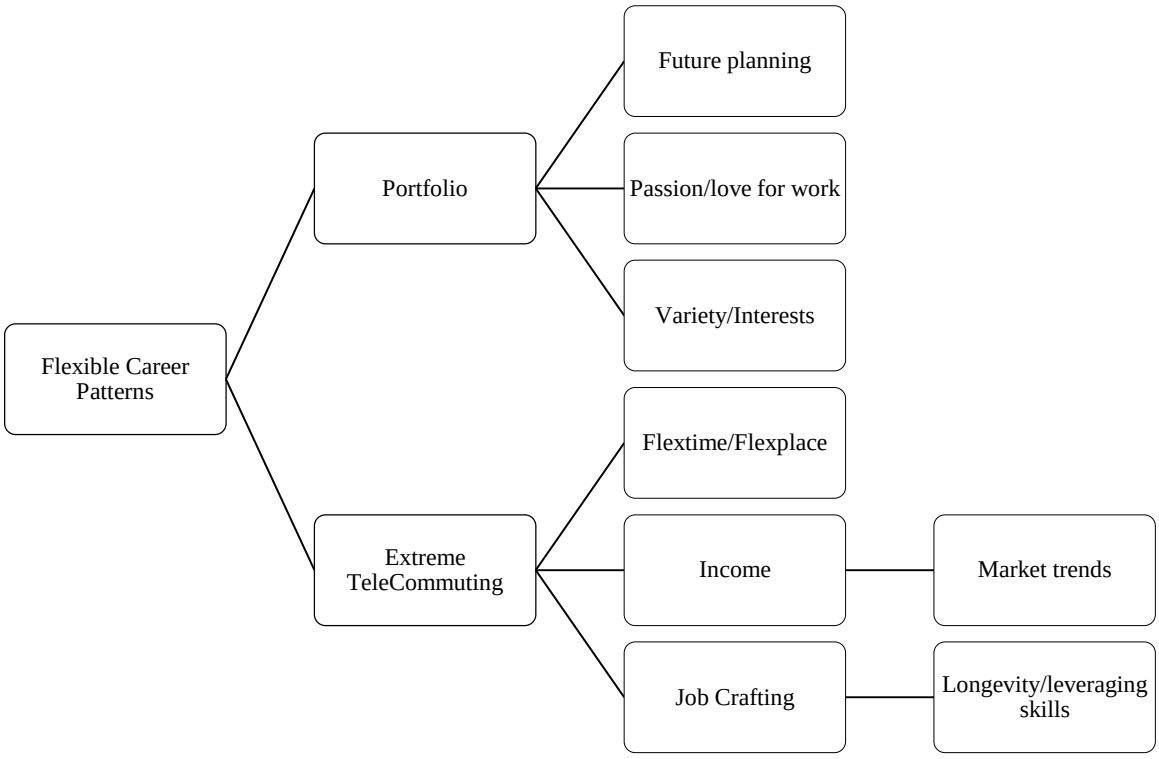

Figure 3: Identified Codes for RQ3

The Self-managed Career

For some individuals, the awareness of the importance of lifespan career development influences their workflow, and involves purposefully extending the work day to engage in professional development. One example is Donald, who explained the additional evening hours he often spends at home on work related projects:

> I'm always trying to think five or ten years down the road about what the company is going to need in my position as opposed to what it is right now. The

> only time I get a chance to really dig into that is after the actual typical workday, which is usually full of tasks. It's usually full of solving the problems that are happening for that day or for that week. You don't get to step back and really extend the lifespan of your role.

Donald's comments reveal a temporal construal that is oriented towards the future, but is challenged by a present-centered focus on organizational problems (Ballard & Seibold, 2003). In such cases, an individual may be more likely to rely on an organizational reward and promotion structure to seek out job roles that better fit with their temporal demands. Moving *up* the career ladder is viewed as the most logical way to progress in one's career. For example, Thomas explained how he is working towards the next promotion and how his movement into the next level of the hierarchy promises him the freedom to pursue other interests:

> …because at the end of the day, at that position I would be able to more so create the job around my life, my personal life. I'd be able to create work life around my personal life for the most part. Then it's a very unique positive that the average person doesn't get in their line of work, to be able to create their work around their personal life.

For others, the realization of the need or desire for career flexibility occurs early and influences career choices and patterns of behavior. Ryan, a trained medical professional, shared his decision to leave medical school for dentistry: "I didn't want to be married to the pager pretty much after medical school. Dentistry – the flexibility was there. Very stable work hours; I pick and choose when I wanted to work as well." He

then explained how later in his career he made the decision to close a thriving private dentistry practice to accept a part-time role in an existing dental office:

> On a norm, Monday through Friday, their day was theirs to have basically. They were always getting together and everything. We started looking at them. We said, wow, we're working so hard in medicine. We need to do something to change that.

Ryan was describing how watching the career behaviors of his extended family led him to be dissatisfied with his current work life. He and his wife, who worked previously as a physician's assistant, made the decision to transition into a completely different career field. Currently Ryan works two days each week at a local dental office, and spends the remainder of his work week managing a hotel development business from home. Ryan's wife, Stephanie, ultimately gave up her position to partner with her husband in the business. Ryan's career behavior is representative of what Gratton and Scott (2016) describe as the *portfolio* career.

The Portfolio Career

Results from this study indicate many individuals are now crafting a career that allows them to move beyond the organizational hierarchy and extend their knowledge and skills into varying realms based on personal interest. This *portfolio* career (Gratton & Scott, 2016) is marked by a willingness to change employers, to relocate, and to try new occupations in the pursuit of career exploration and growth (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). For example, Nicole, a Clinical Pharmacist, described her desire to seek new opportunities when asked about her future career plans. "Actually, just doing something

totally different and just using pharmacy as a backup. That probably sounds crazy I know. I've gone to school this long, but I do see myself transitioning into just something totally different." Nicole was describing a desire for movement beyond her professional training to pursue personal interests. In other cases, particularly those noted from participants in this study, individuals chose to pursue a combination of activities simultaneously. During my interview with Ellen, an accounting professor, the concept of the *portfolio* was revealed:

> Okay, I really think I have three jobs. I have my professor role. Then I'm an author for a textbook with a large publishing house. That requires a lot of time. That would be my second job. Then, I also do a lot of service work through different associations. I sit on several boards of directors.

While many individuals actively balance different types of work (e.g., "gig economy"), Ellen's case is unique in that in demonstrates how flexibility in one role can lend itself to flexibility to participate in other professional, job-related activities. This is noted in Ellen's comments as she explained the percentage of time allocated for each of the "jobs" she maintains:

> I'm really lucky, because I feel like I have full autonomy in handling the control of my time. I would say that probably my professor job probably takes 40% of my time. Then, my textbook writing responsibilities and the associated things that go along with that probably take 40%. Then, my board activities probably take 20%. I need to be able to have a job that's flexible so that I can do these things. Like

> last week – travel for six days out of the week. If I had a job where I, for example, had to teach Monday, Wednesday, Friday…that wouldn't work for me.

What makes the portfolio career pattern inherently different than the gig economy (short-term, often part-time freelance workers) is in the range of motivations driving the development of one's portfolio. Although success often includes experimentation with small-scale projects while remaining employed full-time, Gratton and Scott (2016) explain the portfolio career is only in part about financial accumulation. Exploring personal interests, vitality and stimulation, and learning and making a social contribution are also often equally important. These authors found the portfolio to be a common strategy for mid-career professionals in envisioning their future lives, with building a portfolio becoming central to long-term career planning.

While none of the participants used the term *portfolio* to describe their intentions, the concept of the portfolio career was revealed as individuals discussed the reasons for seeking out a particular type of work and in describing their five- to ten-year career plan. In other example, Paula described her decision to pursue what she referred to as her "second and third careers":

> Retiring from federal service and doing this, although I am still doing a lot of work, it certainly isn't as much as I did before. I consider that I am setting my own times. I am choosing the business that I want. Again, the things that I'm doing are things that I love anyway, that I'm passionate about anyways. My second and third careers that I've picked up are really passions of mine. It's not hard. It's not difficult to do.

The portfolio career pattern represents an important departure from the *boundaryless career* (sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting) discussed in Chapter 1. First, unlike boundaryless movement, portfolio activities are non-linear and instead operate simultaneously. The portfolio also represents a present temporal focus as individuals are selecting roles and activities based on passion and interest. However, it is also as much about future plans for extending one's professional capacity into retirement (as in Paula's case), or at the least to a period when full-time work becomes no longer necessary. As Paula explained:

> The government would allow me to retire with a good pension and with health insurance. That was important to me too. In my 30's I started thinking where do you want to be when you retire? That's when I said well, I will stay in the government. I will do the time in the government so that I can get the pension and the benefits that come with that. Then after that, I'll go out again, and I'll do stuff that I like.

Spatial Flexibility: *Extreme* Telecommuting for Career Longevity

The second pattern of career behavior revealed in this study returns the focus to the need and desire for flexibility as a response to temporal demands such as adjusting for partners' work scheduling and balancing work and family time; but also the ability to exercise discretion over where work is conducted. Technological advances have separated paid work from traditional, brick-and-mortar office spaces creating virtual work spaces where tasks can be carried out at any time and from any location. Whereas temporal flexibility reflects *flextime* (choosing when), spatial flexibility is aligned with

flexplace (choosing where). Spatial flexibility can range from minimizing or eliminating commuting distance to the ability to choose where in the country one lives. My interview with Tina, an elementary school teacher, demonstrated how a lack of spatial flexibility can limit one's long-term career potential. When asked about her five-year career plan, she stated:

> I hope to have my LPC license…I can set my schedule with that. If I want to work today, I can. If I want to see a client today, I can. I can set my schedule to see maybe three clients a week, or five clients a week. I have a lot more flexibility to do that…I can just be able to do what I need to do and do things around my family's schedule.

Tina's comments support a need and desire for flexible work, but she went on to describe how this may not be possible for her because of her spouse's unwillingness to relocate.

> The fact that my husband loves it there [current location] and he is not looking to move anywhere. He works for the government. He loves it where he is. That's another obstacle, trying to get him to say, "Okay, we need to try do to something different." You know, that whole thing.

Monica also described a similar barrier when explaining her plans to re-enter the workforce after downshifting:

> I had to limit myself because I want to stay in Katy. I don't want to have to drive into Houston to work just because my kids are still in school. She's [her daughter] in some activities, so I'm limited by that.

In Tina's case, achieving the flexible work she desires would require a move to a different job market (i.e., different city, state, etc.); however, she is limited spatially by her physical location. For Monica, future career opportunities are restricted by her desire to avoid a long commute. Both instances relate to temporal features of work, but in different ways. Craig offered a useful perspective in further demonstrating the distinction between temporal and physical boundaries as he described the benefits of eliminating the commute to one's place of work:

> I am able to get a lot more done, and I actually save a lot more time for a few reasons. One, not having to get reading in the morning as far as shower, shave, get dressed, all that good stuff probably saves 30 minutes. Not having to commute to work probably saves 30 or 45 minutes. Something a lot of people don't think about also is just literally the transition between all those phases as well – just getting to the car, getting out of the car, getting up to the office, getting settled into the office, getting everything turned on. That probably saves me another 20 minutes or so of that sort of thing. Then, once I actually start working, there aren't any distractions.

This quote demonstrates the temporal link between time and space. Craig is describing how spatial flexibility offers benefits in actual time saved and the return in productivity he receives from the temporal flexibility that allows him to use this time for focused work in a distraction free environment. Paul, a Talent Manager, shared a similar perspective:

> I think I've got it easier quite honestly, because I work remote. What's interesting, when I say easier from the standpoint that I'm not constrained by being in an

> office from eight to five. I have an office here. I have staff here, so I do go in the office. I go in the office two to three days a week. I can even then adjust my time based on traffic to be at the office early, leave late, etc. …it takes away the anxiety. A lot of people are anxious, traffic, getting there. Then going home I've got to fight the traffic. For me, it takes away that whole wasted two hours in traffic.

In both examples, responses effectively demonstrate the interrelationship between these complex issues. The ability to work from home is both attractive because it is perceived as *flexible* in terms of time management and scheduling*;* however, when combined with the ability to live further away from the workplace it becomes an important element of spatial practices as well.

Most interesting were findings from individuals who have found ways to take full advantage of spatial flexibility to carve out a specific career path or to extend the limits of one's position. Crystal, a Wellness Consultant, discussed how she became aware of the need for a "portable" career early, and used this to help frame a career change and later facilitate a move from London to the United States:

> Prior to doing this kind of work, I actually was in investment banking, a completely different career. I did think long and hard about how I could do that and have the flexibility and have a career that I could potentially move countries with. I don't know why I was thinking that at the time because this is a long time ago. I felt that I wanted something that was portable.

Crystal's career path represents an important point of departure from the portfolio career. Rather than diversifying this stage of her career with multiple, work-related activities, Crystal made a career change that facilitated her relocation and the ability to continue in a new line of work indefinitely, even in the event another move becomes necessary. This type of longevity in the life of one's career may not be possible when building a portfolio.

Extreme telecommuting work designs offer individuals the ability to extend the limits of one's position, and often one's career, beyond spatial boundaries. Extreme *commuting* (Levinson, 2008; Miller, 2017), which has not been given a great deal of attention in scholarly literature, is typically defined as spending more than two and half hours a day traveling to and from work. *Extreme telecommuting*, in contrast, involves working primarily from home and commuting long distances (most often out of state) periodically (e.g., once each month) to work onsite. Tony described the benefits of spatial flexibility in explaining why he sought out his current extreme telecommuting position:

> I sought it out for personal reasons quite honestly. I have always been based in a location with this company, the entirety of my career, until I made this move. When I had the opportunity, then we took the opportunity to move to Texas to be closer to my wife's family. As much as I travel, it helps to have her family within a couple hours nearby. We'd always talked about moving closer to her family.

Tony and his family were successfully able to fulfill the long-range goal of relocating to a different region of the country while remaining in a career that he enjoyed. Although he

is required to travel frequently, both he and his wife felt this tradeoff was worth the flexibility, both temporal and spatial, this new job role allowed.

Finally, John demonstrated how extreme telecommuting can extend the life of one's career. Working as a project manager, John and his wife wanted to relocate to be closer to their children. Because he was not quite ready to retire, he proposed a new workflow allowing him to continue with the same company, but from a different state. As John explained:

> It's mainly because I like working for the company. I like the people. I didn't know what I was going to do…it was too early to retire. When the opportunity arose and it just arose through just conversations – Have you thought about this? Do you think it would work? How do we do it? That kind of thing. Then that was exciting to me. I knew the people for one. I knew the job. Now, it just put a whole different dynamic on it. I was all in.

John's experience exemplifies the link between time and space and how extreme telecommuting intersects both. His experience also reflects the interrelationship between the research questions framing this study. The ability to transition to remote work fulfilled John's need for flexibility. Because he was able to successfully negotiate this new work pattern and received organizational support for the change, John was not only able to extend the spatial boundaries of his position, but in doing so, he extended the lifespan of his career as well.

The career patterns outlined here demonstrate significant shifts in the way individuals work and live. These findings highlight long-range benefits from the *work*

from anywhere career model. Extreme telecommuting enables individuals to maintain a preferred level of status, responsibility, and salary with the ability to relocate to a different part of the country completely or simply away from large metropolitan areas and into less populated suburban neighborhoods. Individuals can also avoid the career penalties often associated with downshifting and the risks of self-employment. Because extreme telecommuting work arrangements are also generally associated with home-based, virtual office environments, individuals are also able reap the temporal benefits of flexibility outlined previously.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

During my analysis, I discovered the myriad of ways individuals discuss flexibility. Definitions of flexibility range from *how* (in what order) work tasks are completed and the timing of completion, to the ability to choose *where* (e.g., car or home office; remote or onsite) and *when* work is performed. The individuals participating in this study indicated a strong desire for flexible work with many taking an active role in creating their own flexible work arrangements and career opportunities.

Individuals expressed feeling pressure from organizational structures that continue to focus on productivity, but also a strong desire to do "good work." Combined, these elements have contributed to what can be described as a new individual temporal structure made possible by communication technologies whereby individuals respond to higher expectations for task completion by requiring a level of control over their time during the workday. Although participants expressed the tendency to complete multiple tasks simultaneously, they made few reports of longer work hours or anxiety resulting

from the urgency of layering tasks. This does not imply an absence of psychological stress created by these changing temporal work patterns; but indications of tension simply did not manifest in conversations with participants.

The data collection method allowed me to engage with a variety of professionals about their workday. I was somewhat surprised at the level of passion and interest with which individuals spoke about their occupational lives, with several mentioning the importance of "enjoying" and "loving" what you do. Although this was not identified as a major theme related to this study's goal and purpose, it remains an underlying factor in explaining the various workflow types revealed in the data.

Another theme I anticipated, but did not identify as being particularly salient, is the isolation that is typically thought to be a characteristic of flexible work arrangements, particularly when an individual works from home. Participants in this study discussed strong social networks often facilitated by professional connections. I speculate the same technology facilitating remote work operates as both a factor in helping individuals maintain their connections and in isolating employees working on location. The reliance on technology in the workplace might leave many individuals feeling like "an employee of one" even when working onsite. One participant provided a perfect illustration of the isolation conundrum:

> I've worked onsite at companies and I've worked from home. With this job, it's interesting. I'll tell you why. I was encouraged to relocate to Indianapolis, where the headquarters are. Then my boss gave me several months to try and get things aligned with selling this house and move up there. He said I would like you to

> travel back and forth a couple of times a month just so you can be meeting people face-to-face, making those connections. When I would travel to my destination at the headquarters – the company has gone to a lot of mobile work stations. I would show up thinking I would see my coworkers, but my coworkers – I don't even know where they are! They're like scattered throughout buildings all over the city. For that reason and for some other personal reasons I asked my boss if I could just stay here [working from home].

The interview data presented here offers a snapshot of a very complex and complicated issue. Findings from this study support a view of flexibility as a temporal affordance with personal and professional benefits that extend beyond the boundaries of work and home. While flexibility has become a common component of the contemporary organizational environment, personal preference should figure more prominently in the discussion of flexible arrangements. Participants also revealed common concerns and perspectives regarding the ability to extend flexible arrangements by making them a part of one's future, long-term career plans leading to two distinct temporal career patterns: portfolio careers and extreme telecommuting. The discussion of flexible work and careers will likely continue to play a large role in organizational research, and the temporal approach taken here both clarifies and adds to our understanding of. These contributions will be explored further in the final chapter.

Chapter Four: Discussion

A great deal of attention has been given to the many ways the contemporary organizational environment has changed. This dissertation adds to our understanding of how technological and organizational shifts influence the ways in which individuals work. The underlying temporal nature of these changes, their challenges to members' enactments, as well as the time scales associated with flexible norms and practices highlight the need for a temporal perspective on flexibility. A primary goal of this study was to bring forth an understanding of flexibility as a temporal affordance by emphasizing the enactment of flexibility as a benefit and resource for employees in managing their daily workflow and personal tasks. Findings support previous studies documenting the benefits for employees from enacting greater flexibility in the timing and location of work and the perceived ability to manage work and family demands, handle unexpected events, and lessen the experience of stress and burnout (Hill et al., 2001; Kreiner et al., 2009; Leslie et al., 2012; Putnam et al., 2014). Interview data also supports the importance of organizational efforts in enacting clear policies for alternative work arrangements. Participants revealed a desire to be alone with work by eliminating distractions, while striving for productivity and efficiency in both professional and personal domains. This chapter will develop several of the theoretical insights from the analysis of interview data discussed in Chapter 3 by first situating the need and desire for flexibility within the temporal perspective undertaken for this dissertation. The value of a temporal perspective will then be used to explore organizational changes and individual patterns of career behaviors including the two specific career patterns identified in the

study's findings: the *portfolio* career structure and *extreme telecommuting*. This will be followed by a discussion of practical implications as well as limitations and directions for future research.

DISENTANGLING WORK ARRANGEMENTS: FLEX*TIME* VS. FLEX*PLACE*

The dissertation framework responds to the work of Hill and colleagues (2001) who called for research employing non-survey methodologies and specifically the expansion of flexibility research to a variety of groups. The study design employed here addressed this concern with the inclusion of participants from different occupational groups rather than one organizational site. It also speaks to a multi-dimensional view of flexibility referenced by Myers and colleagues (2012). Engaging participants in narrative interviews about their daily work habits, tasks, and temporal demands recognizes the need to move beyond the exploration of organizational policies to consider the interplay of formalized work designs and arrangements while simultaneously examining organizational members' actual practices (Ballard & Seibold, 2003).

As a result of this approach and its focus on time and the temporal nature of flexibility, an important theoretical distinction becomes apparent. Findings from this study emphasize the significant difference between altering the temporal boundaries of work and altering the physical boundaries of work. Previous studies have conflated flexible work designs with an assumption that when it is possible for employees to work any*where*, it is also likely they can work any*time* (Thompson, Payne, & Taylor, 2014). Flexible work designs are typically classified and discussed under the umbrella of *telework;* work that is conducted away from the primary workplace and facilitated by

information and communication technologies (Overmyer, 2011). This categorization, however, becomes problematic for both workers and employers particularly when organizations are encouraged to introduce telecommuting to promote greater temporal flexibility. In most cases, as this study revealed, telecommuting is a response to *flexplace* rather than *flextime*. Many of the individuals participating in this study reflected some form of telework as an element of their job design and occupation. For those working from home, however, findings indicated many still maintain a typical schedule by working within what are commonly considered to be *core* business hours (Hill et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 2014); normally between 7:00 am and 6:00 pm. This means that while work is conducted away from the physical work location, employees are still expected to be working and available via some form of communication technology during mandated business hours much like an employee working onsite. A relevant quote provided by one participant demonstrates this experience: "Since I do work from home, I always want to make sure that the people I work with know that I'm available any time. It is like I'm an employee in the office."

The perception of more control during the workday, therefore, is a result of possessing the freedom to choose to work within a pre-determined time frame. Thus, in this study, telework becomes a reference to the extent to which an individual can alter spatial boundaries, but does not necessarily imply the ability to alter temporal boundaries as well (Thompson et al., 2014). This finding is a result of moving away from examining policies and looking at individual practice. A focus on practice offers the ability to examine the effects of flextime independent of the effects of flexplace (Thompson et al.,

2014). While individuals in this study communicated an ability to take breaks, and to modify their schedules when needed when working from home, they also shared limitations imposed by mandatory meetings, travel to work onsite, and managing time zone differences. Very few of the study participants described themselves as being completely free from the temporal strains of organizational life, particularly those employed in positions that include peak work demands (e.g., accounting, academics, healthcare, etc.). In these rigid environments, flextime becomes much more difficult, and perhaps also much less attractive. There are times when an employee simply must be available to do their jobs.

Examining individual practice also offered insights in explaining instances in which employees experience complete discretion over both temporal and physical boundaries. These were most frequently individuals who owned their work product (i.e., business owners and entrepreneurs). Although representing only a few of the participants in this study, occupation type and job role were important factors in clarifying the existence of work designs encompassing both flextime and flexplace. These individuals reflected a high ability to make more fluid transitions between competing roles (e.g., "leaving" work to attend a child's school activity; Thompson et al., 2014), and might be thought of as exercising the highest form of flexibility. For organizational policy makers and practitioners, eliminating the ambiguity surrounding the prevalence of such arrangements becomes a crucial element in job satisfaction and in attracting and retaining workers. Such findings are also useful in explaining the reluctance to use flexible work arrangements even when offered. Organizations may offer telecommuting as an option

for employees, but if workers are still expected to be online and available during pre-set work hours, they may not see the advantages of this option. While it may be beneficial for those wanting to avoid a commute (flexplace), for those looking to better manage competing tasks and to increase the amount of time available during the day to respond to personal demands these arrangements may not be perceived as truly flexible. This is an indication that, in many cases, flexplace benefits may be maximized by flextime (Thompson et al., 2014).

THE FLEXIBILITY SWEET SPOT: THE ROLE OF *TEMPORAL FIT*

Findings support a preference for the ability to manage small portions of one's day, and the perception that a sense of control over time and the completion of tasks during the workday is a tangible way to combat the stress and pressures of the 24/7 organizational environment. Researchers have sought to connect unreasonable demands placed by organizations on members' time with the construal of time as urgent and scarce (Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004; Grawitch, Barber, & Justice, 2010; Hill et al., 2001). From this perspective, unhealthy patterns of work behavior are seen as the result of individuals' desire to demonstrate a commitment to the organization by working longer hours (Evans et al., 2004) and struggling to resolve the competition between professional and personal demands. Flexibility is often proposed as the solution to these issues. The findings from this study do not discount previous research exposing the dangers of chasing unrealistic levels of work and productivity, nor does it propose flexibility as the solution to the problems created by fast-paced organizations and an over-extended workforce. It offers, rather, a perspective of flexibility as a temporal enactment that is

most appropriate for individuals in certain contexts (i.e., job role, geographic location, family type, etc.) and also for those possessing individual characteristics and a work style conducive to flexible work and/or careers.

Scholars have made attempts to explain conflicting findings related to flexible work designs. Although a perspective of flexible work as a way to handle competing demands and better manage time for personal tasks during the work day exists, there is also a reluctance to take advantage of flexible work arrangements when made available (Myers et al., 2012; Putnam et al., 2014). This has largely been explained as resulting from an attempt to avoid the negative personal and professional consequences often found to be associated with flexible arrangements (e.g., overload, lack of promotion, trust, and perception of low commitment). Findings from this study, however, lead to a different interpretation. Much like we use organizational fit to explain the compatibility between an individual and an organization, *temporal fit* may be useful in exploring a similar concept whereby organizational members' temporal practices become important variables in determining one's effectiveness and satisfaction in a flexible work design and setting.

Organizational temporality is an essential element in the examination of flexible work designs and arrangements, yet much extant research does not make reference to the human experience of time. The experience of time, as Ballard and Gossett (2007) explain, impacts our communication patterns and, in turn, these communication patterns help frame our experience of time. Thus, the experience of time is dynamic and shaped through the process of communication in a variety of contexts (Ballard & Gossett, 2007)

including organizational environments. Because flexible work arrangements, by design, extend physical work beyond a physical location, there is value in understanding organizational members' experience of time both in and outside of the physical workplace. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) maintain that few other psychological variables are capable of exerting such a powerful impact on the behavior and activities of individuals, making the inclusion of individual temporality in this study a unique feature and setting it apart from previous research. This attention to references about time and temporality in data analysis (discussed in Chapter 3) revealed insights in the subjective experience of temporal flexibility.

The influence of personal characteristics and preferences on the likelihood of success and satisfaction in flexible work arrangements was emphasized by many of the participants in this study, supporting the ideas that (1) personal preferences may influence time management behaviors when working in a flexible environment; and (2) flexible work may be best suited for individuals possessing specific character traits. Several participants noted issues related to the self-motivation and discipline needed to work independently, with some disclosing their own difficulties operating within flexible work designs. Comments such as "I haven't learned yet how to properly balance it all" and "I have not figured that out yet" indicate the importance of self-awareness of one's work style and preferences in determining whether or not to take advantage of flexible arrangements. In contrast, other individuals were able to enact physical and psychological separation through scheduling and the implementation of screening behaviors (discussed in Chapter 3) designed to reduce distractions and interruptions. It follows, therefore, that

an understanding of these individual differences may be useful in explaining employees' resistance to taking advantage of flexible arrangements when offered (Myers et al., 2012; Putnam et al., 2014). Further, to maximize the benefits associated with flexibility, individuals must have the drive to work independently, while also possessing the restraint to know when work should come to an end. These behaviors seem to be crucial in avoiding the negative temporal consequences (e.g., extended work hours, overload, and boundary maintenance) frequently associated with flexible work.

Findings related to temporal fit can also be extended to explore individuals working within established flextime and telecommuting work designs. Organizations often implement flextime policies by allowing employees to create their own work hours within established organizational time frames (i.e., *core time* as previously discussed). Individual temporal preferences can be used to determine the best window within an organization's established parameters an individual should work. While flextime policies are designed to assist employees with personal demands and scheduling, this decision relies on an understanding of one's *critical times* and *cycle shifts* (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995) in order to determine when an individual can expect to perform at their peak level. This means employees and their organizational counterparts need to work collaboratively to respond to individuals' biological time orientations.

Finally, personal preference can also influence task layering behaviors. While some individuals may prefer a clear separation between their work and personal lives, others may have a desire for more integration and an overlap of roles and tasks (Thompson et al., 2014). The preference for focusing on a single task is referred to as a

monochronic approach (doing one thing at a time); while being actively involved in two or more activities simultaneously represents a *polychronic approach* (Bluedorn, Kaufman, & Lane, 1992). By referring to these two patterns of activity as *approaches,* Bluedorn and colleagues (1992) demonstrate the existence of degrees of polychronicity, ranging from people who are very monochronic to those identified as extremely polychronic. The multi-tasking behaviors referenced by participants in this study understandably are not ideal for every individual. The prevalence of the inclination to tackle demands simultaneously, communicated most frequently by individuals in flexible work arrangements in this study, demonstrates that some individuals have a work style that is geared towards task layering behaviors. A relevant quote was offered by a participant working exclusively from home when she noted: "I have a meeting every Wednesday at 10:30am. So, every Wednesday I login to my meeting and fold a load of laundry." It is easy to perceive this performance as a reaction to a sense of urgency or scarcity in addressing competing domestic and professional obligations; but in some cases, like those referenced in this study, it is simply a personal preference. Further, it demonstrates how the favored organizational practice of squeezing multiple tasks into a given time unit (Rubin, 2007) is extended to personal and domestic activities. Individuals adopt the same time-saving, multi-tasking behaviors both at home and at work.

Breaking the Cycle of Availability

Additional findings related to subjective experience also demonstrate the extent to which employees are willing to accept their share of the blame (Gregg, 2011) for the urgency and intensity that have become common when describing the organizational

experience. Participants recognized the difficulty in establishing limits when technology makes it possible to engage in work from any location (Gregg, 2011), indicating what can be thought of as a *cycle of availability.* The adoption of various communication technologies in the workplace provide a convenient method to connect at any given time and to increase availability during non-work hours. Individuals take advantage of this ability in order to meet deadlines and productivity goals, both individual and those imposed by the organization. Imagine an employee with a time-sensitive request to which they need a timely, and accurate response. It seems completely natural they would reach out to the person known to be more likely online during both work and non-work hours. This individual, being concerned not only about their performance and productivity but also with managing the impressions of co-workers and supervisors, responds to the request and feels required to do so regardless of the time of day in which the inquiry is made.

Participants in this study described employer policies designed to discourage this type of behavior. For example, one participant noted, “As a company, we have an indoctrinated work-life balance where you don’t see a lot of work emails on the weekend.” During our conversation, however, he later admitted how he often disregards company policies. “There’s a lot of times when you’re in a crunch, and you have to get something done. I do work weekends. It’s not something that I do often. Once again, you’re never away from work email.” This quote demonstrates the challenge with breaking the cycle of availability when individuals may be guilty of creating the cycle themselves, particularly when it becomes a larger component of how organizational

members engage with one another. Therefore, the same communication technology once perceived as a convenience quickly becomes an expectation and an obligation.

Additional comments offered by participants indicate an awareness of how they can and should prevent themselves from giving in to work related demands during non-work hours. For example, Caroline, a school counselor stated, "Nothing I do right now is relevant to saving the life of a human being. Nothing I do right now can't be done tomorrow morning;" and Julia, a professor, shared a similar work pattern when she stated: "I shouldn't be on the email. I'm not running a hospital where I need to look at nine o'clock at night, so I don't. There's nothing that important or pending that I have to address those things."

The cycle of availability is the result of a workplace that is no longer governed by clock time but by events (e.g., software deployments, product launches, production defects, etc.), peak periods, and the prevalence of communication technology facilitating 24/7 availability. These factors can make work feel invasive, addictive, and all-consuming for some, while for others these same qualities are just as easily described as passion and love for work (Gregg, 2011). The latter was supported by individuals in this study who often described the ability to connect at any given time as a benefit and an advantage. Further, much of the work-life balance literature positions the work role as a negative demand, and contrasts it with the preferred context of family (Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012; Hill et al., 2001; Kreiner et al., 2009; Myers et al., 2012). Thus, individuals, in the attempt to secure more resources (e.g., energy, flexibility, etc.) for time outside the workplace, must then figure out ways to minimize the expenditure of

resources elsewhere (Grawitch et al., 2010). Findings from this study support the idea that, for many individuals, the work experience may not be perceived as the drain on personal resources in which it has typically been framed. Therefore, longer work hours, including those hours spent working from home, may be a signal of occupational commitment, voluntary sacrifice, or a reflection of individual character (Hewlett & Luce, 2006). While these findings again highlight the influence of personal preference and individual work style, it also points to another problem with existing flexibility research to which this study responds.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS AND CAREER PATTERNS

Many organizations have enacted policies that attempt to discourage extended work hours and have made efforts to decrease unreasonable temporal demands; however, employers are not left completely without blame. Researchers suggest the actual number of hours worked has not increased, but an increase in the pace of work has led many employees to perceive they are working longer (Hill et al., 2001). The experiences of participants in negotiating the desire for work flexibility in this study support a need for organizations to take responsibility in defining the temporal structure of the organization by establishing clear practices for how an individual is expected to work from home (i.e., during what hours, using what forms of communication technology, etc.) and clarifying expectations for extending work hours during peak periods. When no formal policies exist for employees to manage their online work obligations, and organizations do not provide guidelines for appropriate response times, employees are left to operate based on vague and self-imposed ideas (Gregg, 2011). For some employees this may mean

becoming victims of the cycle of availability discussed previously, while others may be more inept at exercising more intentionality in structuring their workflow. The ongoing examination of the confusion resulting from unclear organizational policies and a lack of formal procedures may also be useful in explaining reports of varying levels of job satisfaction and the hardships that are frequently associated with flexible work.

Findings from this study do present a hopeful picture for those working with the absence of formal organizational policies and vague work designs and arrangements. Participants indicated the ability to openly discuss the need and desire for flexibility, even if on a limited basis, with supervisors. This was evidenced by informal discussions regarding the need to alter work schedules to meet personal demands. Others were able to negotiate unique work designs (portfolio structure and extreme telecommuting) to accommodate long-term flexibility both in the timing and location of work, thus maximizing temporal benefits. These findings emphasize a changing relationship between employees and supervisors and the negotiating power organizational members possess. It also highlights the importance of competent communication when navigating organizational relationships with employees at all organizational levels, while emphasizing the magnitude of clarity in describing the nature of flexible arrangements (i.e., flextime or flexplace).

MOVING FORWARD: DEFINING THE FLEXIBLE CAREER

Findings offered here do not completely resolve attempts to clearly distinguish flexible *work* from a flexible *career*; but a temporal perspective opens the door for the continued exploration of changing career patterns and behaviors as individuals attempt to

extend the benefits of flexibility across the lifespan. An emphasis on temporality extends our understanding of how individuals employed in flexible positions perceive their professional situation and how they orient to their present working conditions and professional future. Participants communicated a need to define their own career paths by selecting job opportunities based on personal needs and interests and to fulfill a desire for varied work experiences (Redpath et al., 2007) leading to the portfolio career structure. This alludes to a focus on present gratification and future-focused decision making, prompting further temporal exploration. While present-focused individuals act on what is most important today, forward focused individuals base behaviors on what they believe will happen in the future (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). Individuals attracted to the portfolio career structure may operate based on the accepted belief they are in charge of their professional destiny, or will be in the future, and the realization they can no longer depend on the organizational hierarchy to make a long-term investment in their promotion and advancement. Thus, building the portfolio in the present becomes crucial to securing one's professional future even into retirement. Evans and colleagues (2004) describe this as a method of freeing oneself from the normative control of the hierarchy by abandoning organizationally defined norms and values. Individuals pursuing a portfolio career pattern work within existing flexible work designs to extend the time they have available for other professional interests and pursuits. Organizational members are able to take advantage of the flexibility offered in one position to extend the availability of flexibility outside the organization and into the future. Participant comments such as, "We need to think outside the box and find out what other

opportunities there are that would allow us to continue this lifestyle" and "I have different thoughts about different things I always wanted to do. I definitely am going to pursue that as soon as my time is freed up a little bit" were indications of this career behavior.

While the portfolio career structure may signal a lack of commitment to a single organization, extreme telecommuting, the second career pattern identified in this study, demonstrates how organizations are adapting in response to employees' personal demands to actually increase organizational loyalty and longevity. Bailyn (2006) cites instances in which employees taking advantage of flexible work arrangements offered by employers showed greater company loyalty and became more committed to the organization. Findings from this study offer two possible explanations for Bailyn's assertions. First, participants in this study working in extreme telecommuting positions (working from home with occasional travel onsite to a company's physical location) were most often employed in knowledge-intensive or highly skilled technical professions. These employees have a skill set that is difficult to replicate. Likewise, their longevity with the same company gives them organizational knowledge that is also crucial to their job role and responsibilities as well as to the success of the organization. Organizations, recognizing this value, reward these individuals by creating flexible work designs to not only meet the employee's personal demands, but to retain an organizational asset. This tradeoff requires the organization to sacrifice face-time for the promise of commitment.

Extreme telecommuting work designs also extend the life of one's career and build a sense of security when planning for retirement; the second factor related to Bailyn's (2006) claims revealed in this study. Entrepreneurship and self-employment

make the promise of greater control over personal time, but come with extreme risks most individuals are unwilling to accept particularly late in one's career. Further, many individuals take the entrepreneurial path believing they will have increased flexibility only to discover they must work longer hours and continue to struggle with meeting personal demands. Extreme telecommuting, in contrast, offers individuals the opportunity to take on challenging work, regardless of physical location, and continue in their chosen field long-term without the concerns involved with changing family patterns or relocation. These features make extreme telecommuting an attractive work design for individuals at various career stages. The spatial flexibility offered by these work arrangements facilitates flexplace and in most cases, according to participants in this study, many of the benefits of flextime.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

A temporal approach to the study of flexibility has the potential to contribute to both organizational communication theory and practice. Findings from the continued study of flexible careers and work arrangements can provide professionals and clinicians with additional tools to help workers manage the stresses associated with a complex, changing work environment. Snow, Fjeldstad, and Langer (2017) predict a future organizational structure marked by the decreased reliance on hierarchical mechanisms. In the past, organizational members expected to be paid to do a particular job, and looked to managers to establish goals, develop the workflow, and approve the quality of work. Employees working within this structure become both psychologically and economically dependent on a relational hierarchy. In contrast, Snow and colleagues envision future

organizations as more “actor-oriented” requiring members to self-organize in performing work tasks (p. 2) rather than looking upwards in the hierarchy for direction. This means organizations will bypass formalized policies outlining flexible work designs and instead place the responsibility to create effective workflow processes solely on employees. Employees will also likely be tasked with charting their own career development and trajectory in such a way that guarantees the flexible work options they may desire.

Fluctuations in the job market and unstable work conditions are now also a reality for almost every worker. Demonstrating a commitment by weathering long hours in the face of increasing job security may no longer be perceived as a viable option, particularly when organizations can no longer guarantee continued employment (Evans et al., 2004). This may lead to attempts to diversify professional opportunities through portfolio type career movement. Employees will need direction from human resource professionals and career counselors or coaches for professional guidance and emotional support in crafting their own career portfolio. Finally, as organizations continue to rely more heavily on flexible work designs and arrangements with contingent and virtual members, they will need to develop methods to socialize employees at various levels and points of entry into the organizational structure and address relevant issues related to employee satisfaction and well-being amongst a changing population of workers.

Institutions of higher education will also be tasked with preparing students for the contemporary workplace they are likely to enter (Lair & Wieland, 2012). Taking into account the characteristics of the future workplace previously outlined, younger generations can expect flexible work designs that take advantage of the actor-oriented

structure. Although younger generations are known to expect programs promoting work-life balance and rebel against long hours (Snow et al., 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2008), they may be challenged by actor-oriented organizations that rely less on hierarchical structures. New generations cannot expect the clarity and frequency of feedback they have come to rely so heavily upon, and may therefore be frustrated by vague organizational policies (Twenge & Campbell, 2008) that do not clearly outline expectations for flexible work. This means their attraction to flexible options will be complicated by both organizational and generational differences leading to challenges or an overall dissatisfaction with flexible work designs and arrangements.

Younger generations, having experienced the layoffs and job insecurity of their parents, will likely be better prepared for an uncertain work environment in which organizations no longer make guarantees of long-term employment (Evans et al., 2004; Frase, 2013); and this knowledge may encourage them to embrace career patterns consistent with the portfolio career structure identified in this study. Twenge and Campbell (2008) found younger workers often expect fulfillment and meaning in their work recognizing the choice of career is not just about a job but a lifestyle option. Because they have also grown up in a world of opportunities, they are more willing to accept risks, be open to change, and explore new career directions and possibilities (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). These same attitudes and characteristics were found in participants in this study pursuing the portfolio career structure. Likewise, younger generations have also been found to enjoy less rigid procedures and control over their work for the creativity this level of independence offers (Twenge & Campbell, 2008)

making it more likely they may respond well to long-distance, extreme telecommuting work designs.

Finally, the higher education curriculum will need to emphasize the communication competencies necessary for success in a contemporary workplace. One participant stated, " I think the other biggest challenge, and I think this would be in any role, is I kind of feel like I have to work double or triple hard to make sure I build and maintain my relationships." Her comments demonstrate how the flexible career patterns found in this study are built upon one's ability to develop social capital that can be used at various times and career stages as new relationships and professional opportunities arise. Social capital facilitates the introduction of new opportunities for portfolio career strategists and was also evident in discussions with participants working in extreme telecommuting situations. For example, many of the individuals in long-distance commuting arrangements secured these positions by leveraging both the skills and relationships developed in previous job roles. This means younger generations will not only be responsible for their own career development and trajectory, but also with sustaining the relationships, both in and outside organizations, that will propel their career paths moving forward.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study makes a valuable contribution to existing literature, it is not without its limitations. First, findings are based on a limited sample size focused entirely on individual rather than organizational outcomes, and included the examination of organizational policies for flexible work designs and arrangements solely from the

individual's perspective. There are various methodological reasons for the study's design and sample as outlined in Chapter 2, but the explanation of findings inherently proposes solutions to individual rather than systemic issues.

I also recognize, as the research instrument, my presence during data collection may have influenced participants' responses. Very few individuals discussed negative outcomes associated with flexible work, and were overwhelmingly positive about their work and career experiences. Although they were insured of their privacy and anonymity, I can assume some participants may have been hesitant to openly disclose adverse experiences or admit to psychological stress resulting from their unique work designs and arrangements. Participants were also aware the purpose of the study was for dissertation research, and this may have contributed to their positivity. Individuals may have felt the need to provide what they believed to be preferred, or socially acceptable responses to interview questions.

To accommodate these issues and strengthen future research exploring flexible work and careers, organizational scholars should include mixed methodologies by using survey data along with interview responses. Quantitative analysis would capture general tendencies regarding flexible work, and could then be related to the qualitative themes identified from interview data. Likewise, studies of flexible work designs would benefit from job shadowing as a part of the data collection method, particularly when undertaken from a temporal perspective. Job shadowing would move beyond the observation of employees' routine norms, scheduling, and work practices to capture Bluedorn's (2002) conceptualization of *epochal* or event-time. For example, academics and accountants

routinely referenced peak periods and challenges with unexpected events during the workday. Technical professionals also encounter product launches and deployments that change the temporal nature of the typical work day. Being present for and making note of such events during the research process should be accounted for during the coding phase of research.

Finally, future research should look more closely at new career behaviors, such as the portfolio structure and extreme telecommuting patterns identified in this dissertation, with longitudinal studies designed to explore the dynamics of new work arrangements over time. Changing career behaviors can have significant consequences for organizational members in both personal and private realms that may not be immediately realized during on-shot studies. The analysis of the impact of career behaviors over time, particularly across an individual's lifespan, is crucial when findings are used to make projections regarding dimensions of satisfaction with flexible work arrangements and specialized work designs. This focus will allow future scholars to better measure and explain the realities of individuals engaged in flexible work and flexible careers as they exist in a contemporary work environment.

The world of work is now characterized by ongoing technological changes and globalized, complex organizations. A rapidly changing organization environment has led to limited reliance on traditional structures and hierarchies, changes in the standard career model, and shifts in customary thinking about work and careers. Various alternatives to traditional employment, such as the portfolio career structure and extreme telecommuting behaviors presented in this study, now present unique opportunities for career theory

research. Each of these changes is indicative of a shift in fundamentally temporal aspects of work (Ballard & Gossett, 2007); and a temporal perspective of flexible work and careers serves to resolve these concerns. This dissertation begins to address these issues by placing an emphasis on the temporal nature of flexibility. In doing so, the study's findings point to opportunities for continued exploration by examining personal preference and individual differences as a part of the broader context of organizational flexibility, and extends the concept of organizational fit to consider individual temporal norms and behaviors. Findings also contribute to an understanding of flexible work arrangements and designs as well as long-term career flexibility by explicating and disentangling theoretical concepts that continue to be conflated in extant literature. The temporal approach taken in this study supports an agenda for more precise examinations of organizational flexibility for scholars moving forward when exploring the practices and experiences of individuals in today's complex organizational environment.

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